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UP FRONT

At a glance, our customary full complement of departments may seem somewhat unbalanced this issue. But that's only at a glance. Our "First Look" feature this time around more than makes up for any seeming lack of balance, offering as it does a cross-section of comics creators — from writers/artists to letterer, editor and even publisher.

And we have thereby managed, in a much larger sense, a balance of which I am especially proud. COMICS INTERVIEW this issue covers such newcomers to the field as the D'ARC TANGENT crew and **Tod Smith,** while sharing the spotlight with such distinguished and long-term solid professional mainstays as **Jack Abel** and **Joe Rosen.** All that, and we've also made room for the first of several interviews with comics industry insiders from overseas (beginning with Britishers **Nick Landau** and **Mike Lake** talking about Titan Books and Eagle Comics).

Last, but not least, we've even slipped in a celebrity, in the person of TV star-*cum*-collector **Robert Culp.**

It's all part of the in-depth, inside-the-industry approach I promised you in our very first issue. Thanks to the cooperation and goodwill of virtually every company and professional in comics, we've been able to keep our word and bring you the kind of interviews no other magazine can offer.

We're happy with the way things have worked out — and, judging from your letters and all the favorable feedback, you feel the same way. Very early on, somebody said that at the rate we were going, we'd run out of interview subjects in short order. Don't believe it. We've only scratched the surface.

Dan Hagen

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"It's a love story about a woman and a robot."

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With a minimum of fanfare, D'ARC TANGENT made a promising debut and, with a second issue just now available in comics shops, is certainly deserving of closer attention. To that end, I met with the principals in this independent enterprise at a quiet Armenian restaurant around the corner from the Marvel offices, where we had a lively discussion of D'ARC TANGENT over a very unorthodox lunch. Present at the table were Phil Foglio (creator/writer/artist), Freff (producer/writer/artist), M. Lucie Chin (additional pencils/lettering), and Melissa Ann Singer (publisher).

DAK: *What is D'ARC TANGENT?*

PHIL FOGLIO: It's a love story about a woman and a robot, and an adventure story about a war that began eighty million years ago.

The woman — our heroine, Avari T — is a senior agent for Starsift, a kind of lending-library/Peace Corps/ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA with *teeth*. She bonds with Avari M — a male of her species, the Krithians. They are very much in love, very happy, and at the beginning of the first issue's action, he becomes very dead. The way he dies ties into a mystery that has been under investigation for over nine thousand years. Because of the bond, his mate will die, too, without medical help — but, unfortunately for her, the mystery has priority, and before going to a Krithian port for medical help, she must first go to Earth of the 17th Century, where the investigation of the mystery is being conducted. So she's in a race against time for her sanity and her life.

FREFF: And then there's D'Arc himself, the hero. He starts off as an unmodified robot, an Arc Tangent, the most versatile

"RONIN and CAMELOT 3000 would be

Phil Foglio

of his kind. By the time the first issue ends, he's something quite different, a permanently-fused amalgam of alien robot, 17th-Century French nobleman . . . and *something else.* I can't say just what, but there are a number of clues in the first two issues.

Anyway, because D'Arc is so different now, and because Avari T is under so much strain — right on the edge of survival — an "impossible" thing happens. She and the robot bond. Worst of all, on some deep level *she* initiated it! To her, that makes it more obscene than her cultural training already deems it.

M. LUCIE CHIN: *Not* a great beginning for a love affair.

DAK: *Since distributors usually order in advance, and on a first issue there is nothing for them to base their order on, how did you manage?*

MELISSA ANN SINGER: First, to interest people, we promoted the book heavily, taking advantage of **Chris Claremont's** name-value in comics, Phil's in gaming, and the rest of ours in science fiction. Then we did a folder presentation with character drawings and story information, which we sent to the distributors. It was very well designed and printed. And then we gambled.

FREFF: We decided on running 20,000 copies of the book because of the massive price break that happened there. We had no idea if the distributor order would justify it. We just figured that Phil and I were both sons of salesmen, and if worse came to worst we'd hawk it on the streets of Brooklyn ourselves.

DAK: *How did the idea of the story and the basic plot develop? What was the germ? (Everybody points at Phil.) Oh, so you were the germ, Phil?*

PHIL: I was just sketching one day, almost seven years ago, and I drew this picture of a robot with a sword. And I said, "Ah-hah! What possible rationale is there for a robot to be holding a sword?" I came up with a story to answer that question.

DAK: *When you thought this up originally, did you have it planned out to the extent that you do now?*

PHIL: No. I had the basic idea, but I originally planned it to run for about three issues. And, indeed, those first three outlined issues are the basis for the first three issues we're doing now. What changed was this: In my original notes for the second issue, I had D'Arc and Avari T intercepted by an alien, who tries to gain certain information from them. He took over their ship, tried to get what he wanted, failed, and said, "That's it. They win. I am above killing them — it would serve no purpose." And then he went away, leaving D'Arc and Avari T to work out their emotional problems in the wake of all this.

What **Freff** and a lot of other people told me was that having a character bomb in, screw around with my main characters' lives, and then just vanish forever is very much like real life — but is *lousy* storytelling. So the big difference now is that the alien comes in and doesn't go away. He's a pivotal character, the villain of the piece.

FREFF: If you're going to try to say something strong with your protagonists, you really need an antagonist to work them against. So D'ARC TANGENT is still — more than anything else — a love story centered on the Krithian woman and the robot, but it won't be against a static backdrop. Their lives and their universe are going to be torn asunder by various conflicts.

LUCIE: There's also a crowd of prologs at the beginning of the first issue, all of which are important to the story, and all of which are going to weave, eventually, into the central storyline.

DAK: *I hope so. Because I found the prologs to be somewhat off-putting. I really had to work at reading them.*

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This French nobleman must soon face a monster capable of destroying the Galaxy..
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impossible without the alternate market place."

Her name is Avari T.
She and D'arc Tangent are her people's only hope.
There are two problems..
Her people are trying to kill her— and the robot is insane.

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FREFF: The novelistic aspect of D'ARC TANGENT is most evident in the prologs. When we expanded the storyline, we enlarged Phil's universe *enormously*. And in a book, it is accepted convention that you can go off somewhere else for a few pages in order to properly develop other threads of plot. We had to do much the same in the present comic version, blatantly announcing that the material in the prologs consisted of clues and omens that we were scattering about.

LUCIE: In the first issue, two prologs combine to become the main story.

PHIL: In another prolog, we introduce the character people keep calling "that funny little roundheaded guy." That's Maintenance. If we just dropped him in out of nowhere when we finally get to the Derelict, instead of building him up along the way, people would just say: "What's this cartoony-looking thing here in the middle of everything? This doesn't work." We just can't stop the book for fifteen pages and give people his background *then*.

FREFF: Or concerning one of our peasants, Alphonse — it's better to build him up over time instead of just dropping an expository lump in. "Hi, this is Alphonse. He's this French guy over here, he loves his coat, he's very greedy, he's got no money, but he worships wealth."

DAK: *So you're taking the risk that people will wait many issues to see where the subplots are going.*

FREFF: We're an alternative book. The philosophy that is different in the alternatives — at least in this alternative — is that we aren't producing a disposable item. A Marvel or DC comic is around for a month and then it's gone. If you want it after that, you go to a dealer and you pay three times or twenty times the cover price for it. Or more. But we're keeping each issue in print.

LUCIE: And at the same price.

DAK: *This method of publishing, keeping issues in print and building on them, seems to have been pioneered by ELFQUEST.*

FREFF: Yes. Personally, I feel that the **Pinis** and ELFQUEST have done more to reshape this field than anyone else, and that they are getting a lot less credit than they deserve. It's very easy when you work at Marvel or DC (and I've freelanced for Marvel off and on since 1975, watching the people there) to dismiss everybody else, the way New York dismisses everything between the Hudson river and the West Coast. But the fact is that Epic Comics and RONIN and CAMELOT 3000 would be impossible without the alternative marketplace, and ELFQUEST was a trailblazer there. Back when the first fights over creator's rights and royal-

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ties were beginning at Marvel and DC — and failing miserably — Wendy and Richard were quietly doing their work *their* way . . . and making it pay off. I think the mainstream comics finally woke up about a year and a half ago, realized that the environment had radically changed, and have been playing catch-up ever since. Sometimes good, sometimes bad.

DAK: *Phil, you mentioned writing the original story about seven years ago. What happened to D'ARC TANGENT over the years after that point?*

PHIL: I sent it around to all the underground publishers. I have no idea what they thought of it, since I never heard from any of them.

DAK: *Why did you send it to the undergrounds?*

PHIL: Back then, you either published in the undergrounds or you published with Marvel or DC.

MELISSA: It was also in Phil's own style, which wasn't being done in the mainstream comics.

PHIL: Anyway, it sat around for a long time. I showed it to lots of people and they all said, "This is neat; it would make a terrific novel." Several editors even said that if it were a novel they'd buy it. Which did me no good at all, because I don't consider myself a prose writer. Then I moved back to New York, near where I grew up, from Chicago, where I'd gone to

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"I was very pleased when we got Chris Claremont."

art school, and ended up living near **Freff.**

DAK: *Is that when you met him?*

FREFF: At the World SF Convention in Brighton, England, Phil showed me D'ARC TANGENT and I didn't help him at all, because I said what everybody else was saying — "Great novel, Phil. Not much of a comic book, but a great novel." Then, after he was living in Brooklyn and we'd started talking about collaborating, D'ARC came up again .

PHIL: At that point, I got a little boost from coincidence. One of the people I'd shown the first version of D'ARC to was **Hank Stine,** who had become editor at Starblaze Books. One day he called up and said "Holy cow, the ELFQUEST color book is doing so terrific, we just have to do more graphic stories. How about your D'ARC TANGENT thing? I said, "I'll have to redo it. **Freff** and I have changed a lot of stuff." He said, "Terrific, even better, how soon can we have it?"

FREFF: Phil was incredibly excited. Vindicated, at last. It *was* a comic book!

PHIL: It always was a goddamn comic book.

FREFF: But then we calculated the money end of it.

DAK: *Uh-oh. Money enters into it.*

PHIL: Mmmm. We put the advance they could afford against the work and it came to around $5 a page, each. For layout, pencilling, scripting, lettering, inking, coloring — *everything.*

DAK: *You decided you didn't want to work for $5 a page?*

FREFF: More like we couldn't afford to.

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So there we were. Editors had expressed interest in novel and color collection versions, but there was nobody to do the first marketing. Except ourselves. It was a little over a year ago, in February, 1982, that the discussion began to heat up. Phil and I started looking into investors and costs. I called **Richard** and **Wendy Pini,** since I'd known them for over a decade, to ask them questions about printers and distributors. In general, we just started gathering a lot of information. For weeks I did little paper projections of costs versus production time.

LUCIE: The computer was panting.

FREFF: Oh yeah, the little Apple II accounting programs were running like mad. That's also about the time I dragged Lucie and Melissa into the project. Lucie I knew because we'd worked together as a troubleshooting team for SF convention artshows, among other jobs. We needed a letterer, and I didn't have the time to learn to do it. Phil's lettering is kind of like his spelling — haphazard. Great with sound effects and titles, though . . . but we needed a regular letterer. Lucie volunteered.

LUCIE: I had never done any lettering before, but **Tom Orzechowski** was in town and I spent a lot of time in a two week period leaning over his shoulder and asking "What are you doing? Why do you

Freff and friend

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"We're not stealing anybody's notions."

do that? How do you do this?" The man has infinite patience.

FREFF: So Lucie was in as a letterer—it wasn't until we were deep into the book that her own pencilling skills proved invaluable for tightening up continuity and providing an interface for me and Phil . . . but getting back to the beginning, another thing I'd realized when doing financial projections was that neither Phil nor I could be publisher. Partially because we would be too busy, but mostly because we didn't have the necessary basic skills and attitudes to keep the act together. So I started going down a mental list of all the people I knew who could like both Phil and me, who was a fan of both science-fiction and comics — because this was an unusual thing we were going to be trying — and who would just basically be Competent and Good and True and stupid enough to agree. The only person I could think of was **Melissa Ann Singer**, associate SF editor at Berkley Books. I knew her because I'd illustrated for them and sold stories to two of their anthologies. Anyway, I called her up, soaked her for investment money, and then asked if she'd like to be the publisher.

PHIL: Then we got **Chris Claremont** to come in as a consultant. We needed somebody who really understood telling a story in panel-by-panel form and who wasn't as close to the story as **Freff** and I were. I was very pleased we could get him, because I've always respected his work.

DAK: *Melissa, was publishing D'ARC TANGENT a new experience? Had you published before?*

MELISSA: Not really. I never wanted to be in the book business; I'd studied computer engineering in college. And even though I had read comics and SF since I was very young, I never actually considered working in the field until I sort of stumbled into it in 1978. So when D'ARC TANGENT came along I had a lot of learning to do in a very short time. But you can pick up an awful lot in a publishing company if you just keep your ears open and listen to what other people are saying, even if it isn't directly related to what you're doing at the time.

DAK: *How have you found the actual publishing, where you deal with printers and distributors and so on?*

MELISSA: Schizoid. For the first issue, I did not deal with the printers because **Freff** had made the contacts through Wendy and Richard and because I couldn't break away from the 9-to-5 at Berkley often enough. But I did just about everything else, and will eventually take over the rest as well. Dealing with the distributors has been an education; they are very good. You say something stupid and they'll say "No, it doesn't work that way." At Chicon, when I walked into the distributor's meeting with a color proof of our first cover, I got two reactions. First, their eyes bugged out of their heads, and second, I got a twenty-minute crash course in what we had done wrong on the project so far and how we could fix it.

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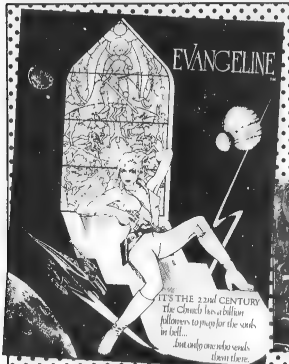
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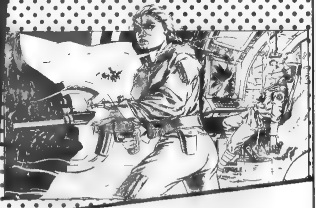

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"We aren't producing a disposable item."

DAK: *Can you talk, without giving things away, about the upcoming plotline?*

PHIL: Well, aside from the growth of the love story, I want to present one alien attempting to remake the galaxy in his image — and doing it so people will accept it and believe it. It is a pretty outrageous idea. One alien against the galaxy, and the galaxy doesn't stand a chance. *(The waiter arrives with Phil's espresso. He takes one look at its pitch-black Armenian depths and asks for milk. The waiter looks utterly appalled.)*

WAITER: This coffee — it is not the kind you put anything in.

FREFF: Except your faith.

PHIL: If you say so.

FREFF: The entire run of D'ARC TANGENT, love story and all, is actually *— (sudden interruption of strangling noises, as Phil sips the espresso)* — is actually the last battle in that war that began eighty million years ago, and which has been on hold ever since. Now it is finally being resolved. And the characters in our prologs, or aspects of them, are some of the principals in that resolution. They'll be going through some very great changes. And there are others; an Ahab-like figure known as Orange Waveform and an older Krithian woman named Malafre H will be coming in eventually, and Spanner and Overseer. All kinds of characters, major, minor, serious, silly . . .

LUCIE: Essentially, we have two forms of comic relief in this. Maintenance, who'll be only partly funny, and blackly comedic at that, and Alphonse and Raphael, who are kind of like Shakespeare's guards at the gate, and supremely unequipped to lead the life they're about to lead. Not that they were very equipped for the one they *were* leading.

PHIL: A lot of people think the French guys are our versions of **Freff** and myself. This is definitely not true.

FREFF: I don't have any really direct representations of myself in the book, though I feel close to characters like Avari T, who is loosely inspired by the women I know who have had to struggle all alone with tremendous losses and pain. But Phil . . . Phil's all through this book. The people who know him only by his cartooning would never guess how many of our nasty undercurrents and grim implications come from him.

PHIL: The big three representing me would be Maintenance, Imrak, and our villain, the lizard Kazzor. Maintenance is the off-the-wall weird aspect of me, with certain Byronesque touches. Imrak is just the opposite. He has very few emotions except for pride in a job well done and a lot of orderly, stern, paternal aspects. He simply isn't comfortable unless everything

M. Lucie Chin

IMRAK

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fits together and functions the way it should. And Kazzor . . . Kazzor is the deep megalomaniacal beast within my soul. *(Laughter.)* Which isn the most dominant part of my subconscious but luckily the most buried. It would be the easiest to release, were the right opportunity made available. This worries me a little, but since the power necessary to manifest my Kazzor-side would never be possible for me to get, I don't worry too much.

FREFF: Perhaps if you were bitten by a radioactive lizard . . .

PHIL: I don't stay up nights worrying about it. I hope the world won't, either.

DAK: *You mentioned science fiction in the book — is it real science fiction?*

ALL: Yes. Absolutely.

PHIL: None of this quasi-mystical bullshit.

MELISSA: We are staying within certain conventions, accepted SF elements like tractor beams and FTL drives, and such. But we're not stealing anybody's notions. And we're not just transplanting fairy tales to outer space, or trying to do the Great American Novel, only set on a spaceship. Actually, what we are doing is a little old-fashioned in some ways. More like the things **Edmond Hamilton** wrote. It isn't dated — it's just that it reminds me of the things I liked best when I was growing up, a mix of alien cultures, a lot of ideas, a lot of "heroism." It's soul-searching in the way some new wave stuff is soul-searching, but it doesn't have new wave's downbeat flavor.

(The waitress and waiter come out of the kitchen, and the waitress is clearly saying "Last night was perfect weather for were-wolves." This stops the interview cold for a round of speculation about what the

"I want a strong story perfectly

hell goes on in that kitchen, anyway. Phil, having given up on the espresso, knows.)

FREFF: I hope, in that sense, that we're doing something original in comics. I can't think of any good SF in the field that wasn't *adapted* from an existing literary or movie work. We're trying to do something that's both very good and not derivative.

DAK: *Is it a real love story in the way that the science fiction is real?*

ALL: Yes.

DAK: *It isn't a comic-book love story?*

ALL: No.

LUCIE: These characters are going to go through some very heavy emotional swings.

FREFF: Put it this way — comics suffer a lot from the fact that many of the people doing them have never read or dealt with anything but comics. That's limiting. When we set to do this as a novel I wanted it to be such a strong story that it would be perfectly capable of winning Hugo or Nebula nominations without anyone thinking twice about it. And that hasn't changed, just because we're doing it as a comic first.

DAK: *Is there an overall theme? Or subthemes running through the story?*

MELISSA: I think one of the themes we are working with is the discovery of the self. A lot of the metamorphoses that the characters will go through involve the stripping away of their veneers, removing their natural contexts, and forcing them to explore what is left. Especially in the case of the Ambassador. Another thing I think we're saying is that individuals can make a difference. So many people today are caught up in feeling that what they do isn't important. What will come out in our story is that everyone is important, either to a particular other person or in the grand scheme of things.

Melissa Ann Singer

FREFF: There's a line from the first issue I'd offer as sort of a summary of theme. When the French Duke, D'Arvieux, gives in to the pressures of his time and position and allows the local Priest and peasantry to burn Avari T and Imrak at the stake, he tells Imrak — who is kind of a combination father-figure and waking nightmare for him — that he has no choice. Imrak's reply is "There is always choice, Jacques-Jean . . . and consequence. *That* is a truth from which you cannot abdicate." That's true for a lot of the characters and situations in this story. I don't mean it to sound like we're trying to write WAR AND PEACE. We're not. But we are trying to do something we can be proud of for a long time and that readers can keep getting new stuff out of by rereading, just because we packed so much in.

DAK: *And you've got it limited to sixteen issues?*

PHIL: That's our working length.

FREFF: That's a rough estimate. Obviously we know a lot in the beginning and a lot at the end, but in the middle we've only sketched it loosely. If we did it any other way the next five years of production would be very dull.

PHIL: It also lets our ideas expand between us in creative ways. Colonel Teel, one of the strangest aliens in the entire series, came about that way. When I rough out my ideas for the story I'm *very* sketchy.

FREFF: When he gave me the rough notes for page 4 of the first issue, there was a circle with dialog that said something to the effect of "Greetings, we are approaching the Wall. The Captain would like to know if you would care to view the approach from the bridge." Very straight, very formal. But when he handed me his actual pencilled page there was this . . . this . . .

PHIL: This round, two-legged, one-eyed clamshell.

FREFF: Right. And I just could *not* give him straight, formal dialog. No way. I stared and stared at it, and listened to the little voices in my head, and finally one of them said "Mr. Ambassador? We conform your arrival imminent as you inquested." This led instantly to the Ambassador's response, "Colonel Teel, you're translator is out of order again" and Teel's clear-as-a-brick reply to that, "Fourteen, fourteen, and twelve. Shelf-mates honored by concern."

LUCIE: Suddenly, it was obvious what that medallion was that Phil had drawn around his neck — the malfunctioning translator.

FREFF: The dialog kept getting stranger and stranger, and it taught us how and why he thought. And after that we just couldn't let him go.

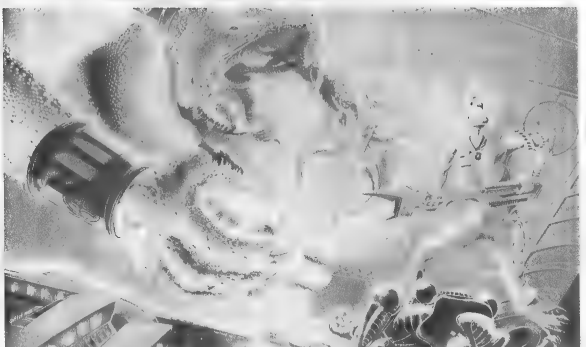
MELISSA: Now he's a major figure in the story.

MR. AMBASSADOR? WE CONFORM YOU ARRIVAL IMMINENT AS YOU INQUESTED.
COLONEL TEEL, YOUR TRANSLATOR HAS SLIPPED OUT OF ADJUSTMENT AGAIN. DO YOU MEAN WE HAVE ALMOST ARRIVED?
FOURTEEN, FOURTEEN, AND TWELVE. SHELF-MATES HONORED BY CONCERN.
SIGH... OF COURSE
IN SAVAGE CONCERN CAPTAIN INQUESTS WOULD AMBASSADOR WISH TO VIEW ARRIVAL IMMINENCE WITH OWN EYES AND EYES? FROM BRIDGE?
THAT IS INDEED AN HONOR, COLONEL. MY "EYES AND EYES" WOULD BE DELIGHTED.
LEAD ON.

From D'ARC TANGENT #1

©1982 ffantasy ffactory

capable of winning Hugo nominations."



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Cover illustration for D'ARC TANGENT #2.

FREFF: In the climax and everything.

MELISSA: Actually, we don't have too many minor characters . . .

PHIL: We'll be generating swarms of them.

LUCIE: Laser fodder.

DAK: *Have you been reviewed anywhere?*

MELISSA: In the BUYER'S GUIDE, by **Don Thompson.** It was a marvelous review. . . . . .'

PHIL: He all but threw himself face forward into the dirt and said "Allah, the White Gods have come." *Great* review.

MELISSA: He picked up on all the things we hoped people would pick up on. The fact that it's a novel, for instance. There are other reviews coming up in FANTASY NEWSLETTER and the DRAGON. We're getting a lot of cross-over reaction from other fields than strictly comics.

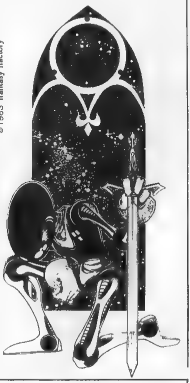
DAK: *What have the science fiction fan and writer reactions been like?*

MELISSA: SF writers love it. At conventions we've heard one thing over and over — "I don't like comic books. I don't read comic books. I liked this one. When's the next issue coming out?"

LUCIE: And we're being carried by several SF shops that normally *never* carry comic books.

DAK: *That's a good sign. But tell me — why are you doing this? It's a lot of work and a tremendous gamble.*

MELISSA: Do you want our lofty motives or our base ones?



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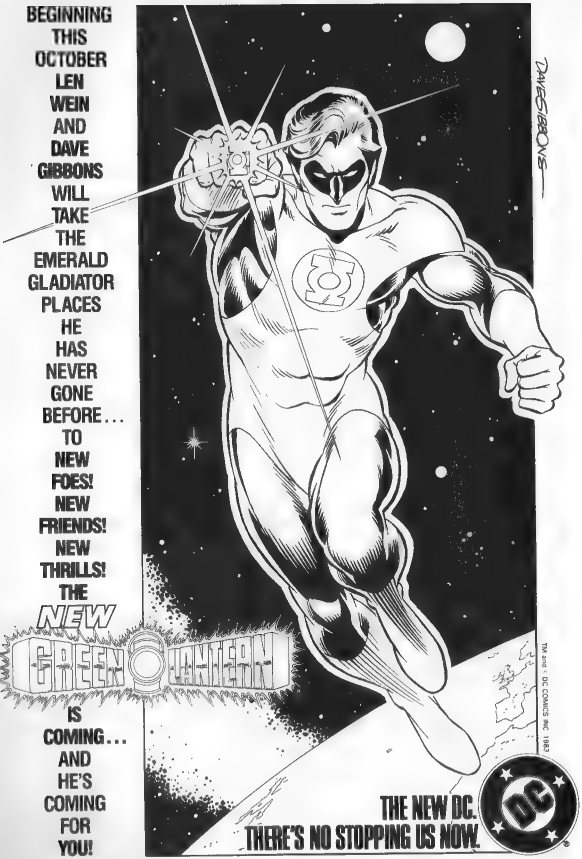
DAK: *Both.*

MELISSA: Lofty motive time: I liked the project when it was first explained to me. I could see it was going to be a fascinating world to deal with, and I wanted to be part of it because there was this incredible energy building up between **Phil and Freff.** My base motive is that I'm a greedy materialistic person at heart. I would love to not have to work for somebody else, and if D'ARC and **fantasy factory** work out they could free me from the corporate structure I'm in now, so I could go out there and work with the kinds of talents that don't fit in the structure and still support myself.

FREFF: When I started out I was in it for the challenge of telling this — hopefully — strong a story, and because this could make me enough money someday to buy my recording studio. But after I finished the first issue I realized I was really in it to learn gratitude. I can't explain this well to people. I suspect only **Wendy Pini** really understands what I mean by it; she was there when I learned the lesson.

PHIL: Actually, it never occurred to me, once I had the opportunity, not to do it — no matter how tough.

LUCIE: Call it a magnificent obsession. I think the story has great power. And I can say that because I didn't write it.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DAVE GIBBONS
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THE NEW DC.
THERE'S NO STOPPING US NOW.

"With THE OMEGA MEN I have my hands full."

TOD SMITH

When Keith Giffen departed THE OMEGA MEN, a relatively unknown young artist was chosen to replace the popular penciller. From the looks of his fantastic work for DC, Tod Smith is destined to join the top ranks of truly popular comics artists such as Giffen, Paul Smith and George Perez.

DAK asked me to talk with Tod and find out all about his life before THE OMEGA MEN — and how he's reacting to this sudden leap into the limelight. I found Tod to be modest, articulate and intelligent, with a resonant, well-modulated voice that conveys a maturity beyond his years. He spoke candidly about his new-found notoriety, his work on the controversial space-saga, his opinions on violence in comics, and his pre-comics career as a "honky-tonk man"...

BILL CHADWICK: *I understand that before you became a comic-book artist, you had a pretty colorful career as a rock'n'roll guitarist.*

TOD SMITH: Oh, jeez, I could write a book! I played so many crazy clubs, it's hard to pin-point one. For a time I was playing with a couple called Sam and Kitten. Sam was a truck-driver who dressed all in black leather and wore an earring. Kitten was a former stripper who used to work with boa constrictors. I was part of their band. They were doing up-beat rock and current country music — **Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings,** that kind of stuff. Oddly enough, Kitten was a good singer. Being a former stripper, she was totally relaxed on stage, and didn't care what she did or what she said — totally uninhibited.

BILL: *Did she strip, or use the boa constrictor?*

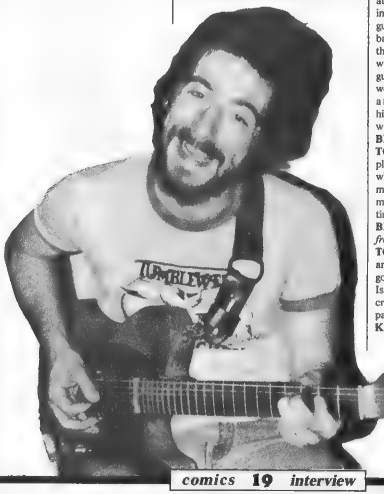
TOD: Oh, she didn't do either, but she wore a real tight denim outfit, and a T-shirt that looked like it was spray-painted on her. Unfortunately, the guys in the audience were ogling her more than listening to her, and Sam was a very jealous guy. He used to play rhythm guitar as back-up, and sometimes, if he didn't like the way guys were looking at Kitten, he'd walk into the audience — still playing his guitar, but with murder in his eyes. I would think, "Oh, no, there's going to be a fight." But there never actually was. We hit it off and I had a good time playing with them.

BILL: *Do you still play?*

TOD: Occasionally, in bands. I can't play as much as I used to, but I do it whenever I can — just trying to keep my music, my playing, up to some level, and my art up to some level. They're both full-time jobs.

BILL: *How did you make the transition from musician to artist?*

TOD: I was about twenty-five years old and I didn't know really where I was going. Work for a rock musician in Rhode Island is sparse, and I was kind of at a crossroads. Then some friends of my parents sent them a clipping about the **Joe Kubert** School. And I just looked at it and said, "Yeah! This is the only thing I have an interest in doing — some kind of drawing." So, in 1978, I enrolled.



"Gil Kane gave me a good kick in the

BILL: *Had you been interested in comics before?*

TOD: Always. I'd bought them steadfastly through my teens. Before the age of 11, I had no interest in Superman or any of the other super-heroes. They didn't appeal to me. I used to buy THE FLINTSTONES and YOGI BEAR, stuff like that. Then one summer, when I was 11 or 12, I was with my family up in Maine, vacationing in a borrowed cabin, and in town one day I saw some comic-books in the store — an issue of DETECTIVE COMICS and a SUPERBOY ANNUAL. The time was just right and it clicked. I got 'em home and I read 'em and I just dug the hell out of 'em. And I started drawing guys in tights like Batman and Superboy, and that was it. When we got home to Rhode Island I went out and bought more, and I kept buying for the next six or eight years.

Just one another early influence I'd like to mention – the TV show, **ZORRO.** I've got to be the biggest **Guy Williams**-ZORRO fan of all time.

BILL: *When I was a kid, I sent him a fan letter and he sent me back an autographed picture of himself as both Don Diego and Zorro.*

TOD: Really?

BILL: *Yeah, I also had the sword with the chalk on the end of it so you could carve Zs.* (Laughter.)

TOD: I had one of those, too. Only the chalk was too heavy. Every time you made a Z, it broke. I had the whole outfit

Early cartoon by Tod Smith

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tod Smith
Occupation: Cartoonist
Born: Providence, Rhode Island — 4 October 1952
Residence: Milford, Connecticut
Training: The Joe Kubert School, plus a Dick Giordano inking workshop.
Credits: As penciller: THE OMEGA MEN. As inker: DC COMICS PRESENTS #2 and MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE.
Favorite Artists: The Three Ks — Kane, Kirby and Kubert. Among younger artists, Brian Bolland.
Pet Peeve: Deadlines.
Favorite Movie: THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL.
Favorite Comic: Currently, CAMELOT 3000. My all-time favorite series is THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

— the mask, cape, and so on. I think that was the start of it all right there — romantic heroes with secret identities. That was where I got hooked.

BILL: *When you were a teenager, and doing your early super-hero drawings, did you ever show them to a professional?*

TOD: No, not until my 20s, when I met **Gene Colan** at a small convention in Rhode Island. I showed him some sketches that I had done. He was very nice, very encouraging. He said, "These have a nice feel to them," and suggested I show them to someone in the comic-book companies. He was a good positive reflection on the industry. Someone asked him, "Do you like what you do?" and he said, "Yeah, I enjoy it a lot. It's fun." And I thought, "Wow, that sounds good!" It's always great meeting a professional for the first time, and I'm glad he was the first one I met.

BILL: *Which professionals taught at the Kubert School?*

TOD: Bob Oksner, Dick Giordano, Dick Ayers . . . . Joe Kubert himself, of course — he's a good teacher and had a lot to tell us, but there were a lot of demands on his time.

BILL: *What kind of things does an aspiring comic-book artist study at a comic-art school?*

TOD: Anatomy, of course — you have to have a fairly good knowledge of that. Some basic mechanical things, like perspective. **Bob Oksner** had a Design course dealing with abstract ideas such as Use of Space, Black and White Design, Composition, things like that. We also had a course in Storytelling taught mutually by **Bob Kanigher,** who's an editor and writer, and **Kubert** himself. **Kanigher** gave you an editor and a non-artist's input, which was good, because usually editors aren't artists and they only know if they like what they see — they don't know really why they like or don't like something.

BILL: *What do editors like, anyway?*

TOD: Every editor has certain pet qualities they are looking for, but they all want clear storytelling and a dramatic approach. Storytelling is the strongest thing you learn at the Kubert School. You can see it in the work of other people who were students there at the time and are becoming prominent now.

BILL: *Such as . . . ?*

TOD: I knew **Jan Duursema** and **Tom Mandrake,** who are doing some great work, now, and **Ron Randall** and **Tom Yeats,** and a friend of mine who, unfortunately, is not doing work for DC now, but for First Comics — **Tim Truman,** who's doing GRIMJACK, the back-up feature in STARSLAYER. Even in school his stuff was really outstanding.

BILL: *Did the teachers try to influence your style?*

TOD: No, they had a policy of trying *not* to . . . which I didn't always agree with because I figured that everyone who's got a style now started out influenced by someone else, and that includes the old-timers. You know, **Kubert** was influenced by **Foster** and **Caniff** and **Raymond** and all those guys.

BILL: *How long did you stay in the school?*

TOD: About a year and a half — three semesters. Then I started running low on money, and I felt I had learned what I wanted to learn in the first year. With the money I had left I decided to come out to Connecticut and take **Dick Giordano's** workshop, which he used to give. Dick taught it with **Frank McLaughlin.** I caught the last of the three workshops —a ten-week course on inking. So the first work I did as a professional artist turned out to be inking.

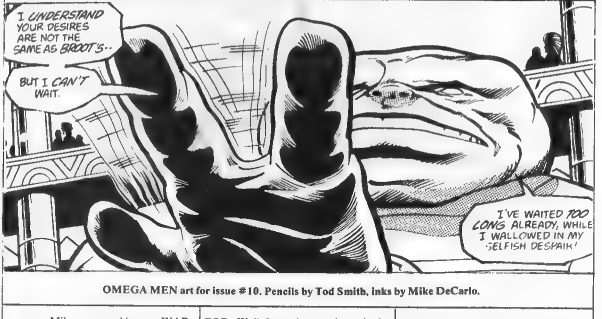
BILL: *What kind of jobs did you do?*

TOD: I did backgrounds for **Frank McLaughlin** for almost a year, and some work for **Mike DeCarlo.** It was my work for Mike that led to my first public billing as an artist.

BILL: *For what book?*

TOD: DC COMICS PRESENTS ANNUAL #2, the introduction of Super-

backside, which I needed.*(Laughter.)*"


I UNDERSTAND YOUR DESIRES ARE NOT THE SAME AS BRODIT'S--
BUT I CAN'T WAIT.
I'VE WAITED TOO LONG ALREADY, WHILE I WALLOWED IN MY SELFISH DESPAIR!
©1983 DC Comics, Inc.

OMEGA MEN art for issue #10. Pencils by Tod Smith, inks by Mike DeCarlo.

woman. Mike was working on WARLORD at the time and was really on a deadline, and needed help to get the Superwoman story in on time. So I did the backgrounds, and most of the figures, minus heads and hands. Mike would go back and do that. It's kind of a comic-book tradition that the inker who gets the credit — in this case, Mike — does the heads and hands because they're the most important part of the figure and retain his look.

BILL: *But you ended up getting public credit for it anyway?*

TOD: Yeah. Mike asked **Julie Schwartz** to give me special mention because without the extra help from me the book would have been very late. So **Julie Schwartz** was very nice and said, "Sure, give him credit." So under Mike's name in the book appears, "with a special inking assist from **Tod Smith**." It was very nice to see my name in print for the first time.

So I was splitting my time between Frank and Mike, when **Dick Giordano** helped me. I owe my career to **Dick Giordano.**

BILL: *How so?*

TOD: He would always try to steer work my way. When they needed an inker at DC, he said, "Well, try this guy. He's new, but he can do it." When they were looking for a penciller, he mentioned my name again. He's just been the right person at the right time in the right place, keeping me in mind and being kind of a spokesman, for which I'm very grateful.

BILL: *You're described in a recent mini-biography as one of "The Legion of Former Dick Giordano Assistants."*

TOD: Well, I wasn't an assistant in the sense that **Mike DeCarlo** or **Terry Austin** or **Klaus Janson** was, doing backgrounds for him on a regular basis. I just would help him out, moonlighting under his

name, doing figures and things like that. I just did the work, passed it back, and he would make any corrections or changes that had to be made and send it to the printer without feedback. So I never really was **Dick Giordano's** assistant, officially, but I've had an on-going relationship with him since attending his workshop.

BILL: *Okay, so what kind of work did he steer your way in those days?*

TOD: Things for DC's Special Projects Department — which is mostly toy merchandising and little booklets and comic-books that go with the toys. I got to do full inking — backgrounds, figures, the whole works — for six of the comic books that were included with the MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE toys. **Mark Texiera,** who's right now doing the POWER LORDS book, did the pencils.

BILL: *Was all this inking you used to do good training for what was to come later?*

TOD: Yeah, it was a good experience. I learned a lot working with Mike and Dick and Frank. But I always wanted to be a penciller. In fact, I was like a lot of other beginners when I entered the comic-book field — I really didn't know what inking is.

BILL: *Well, for those who don't know, what is it?*

TOD: There's more to it than this, but basically what an inker does is take the pencil drawing and convert it to a black-and-white design, conveying the sense of three-dimensionality that the penciller is trying to put across. A good inker has to have a good abstract sense, a sense of what looks good in black and white —

THIS IS MAGGIE...

...charming, petite, fragile and mad at the world. Ah, yes, Maggie...what a perfect comic book character she makes.

Meet Maggie and her friends Hopey, Penny Century and Izzy as they find love, parties, food, danger, and the meaning of friendship in "100 Rooms"—the lead story in **LOVE AND ROCKETS #4.**

It all started when Maggie saw the beautiful, black, steel-toed bomber boots in a shop window. Not much of a way to start an adventure, but for Maggie and her friends, just making it from one day to the next is a grand adventure. The whole problem is, the boots cost $48.50. Money Maggie doesn't have.

Penny Century and her millionaire friend-with-the-horns, H.R. Costigan, come to the rescue as the four girls go to spend a few days at the Costigan mansion, a building a body could easily get lost in, and some do. Then there's the party featuring the return of prosolar mechanic Rand Race and the entrance of Demona, Costigan's amazon bodyguard. Art and story by **Jaime Hernandez**.

LOVE AND ROCKETS #4 also contains the no-holds-barred conclusion to "Heartbreak Soup," which began in issue **#3**. In this story **'Bert Hernandez** tells of love, lust, broken hearts, lost friends, murder, and pregnancy--all set in a strangely realistic barrio setting.

Plus another installment of **'Bert**'s "Music for Monsters," a short outer space adventure by **Jaime**, and "Twitch City," a surreal story of an ultraviolent future by **'Bert**.

Yes, I want to be counted among the readers of the critically acclaimed comic. Please send me [check the correct boxes]

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"I don't enjoy depicting explicit violence."

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what will reproduce cleanly and look very bold. If you're got a good black and white design, then the colorist will simply enhance that and add another dimension to it. But if it's not a good black and white design, color won't help it.

What's funny is that in doing backgrounds for **Mike DeCarlo** I learned his inking style, and now, with THE OMEGA MEN, Mike's inking my pencilling. So, hopefully, that should make for a good combination of our styles. Mike has a very good graphic sense and I picked up a lot from him.

BILL: *You also did backgrounds for Gil Kane, didn't you?*

TOD: Yeah, I did — for a week, last summer, on a SUPERMAN annual. I worked at his house with him. Getting to meet **Gil Kane** was a real thrill, because I had admired his work for years. In one week, I picked up a helluva lot of information. He loves to talk so I would just sit there and listen. I wish I could have been taking notes while doing the backgrounds.

BILL: *What did you pick up from him?*

TOD: First, his approach, which is very classical. A thorough grounding in structure — structure in the figure, in just about everything. Expressing a three-dimensional quality by knowing perspective. Foreshortening, which gives you depth and volume. He's very learned in all these important technical areas.

The other thing I picked up from **Gil Kane** that was very important was motivation. I took some of my work out there to show him, and he looked at it, and said that he saw a basic talent underneath it all. But he said, "You know, if you're going to make it in this field, you're going to have to bust your rear-end, because there are a helluva lot of guys trying to break into comics. Unless you're totally committed, you're not going to make it." No one had really said that before. He said, "Either you're going to do it or you're not going to do it. If you're not going to do it, give it up now. If you're going to do it, devote at least six months of really intensive effort to it, to see if there's any improvement in your work. If you don't see any improvement after six months, give it up then, because you'll be wasting your time." He gave me a good kick in the backside, which I needed. *(Laughter.)*

So after that week, after I was just about finished, I got a call from Special Projects offering me the inking job on THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, and I took it. And when I told **Kane,** he said, "Okay, fine," because he understood

Art by Texiera for POWER LORDS #3, inked by Tod Smith.

it was an opportunity to move up and along. It was a turning point for me, because having been an assistant for two or three years I finally was getting total control over at least one aspect of the work.

BILL: *Did you apply yourself more intensely, as Kane suggested?*

TOD: Yes, much more intensely. I studied harder in my spare time. I saw that **Kane** used bodybuilding books — PUMPING IRON stuff — for additional reference — although he knows anatomy inside out — so I thought, "If he can do it, I can do it," and practiced drawing from bodybuilding books, staying up late at night, drawing three or four hours at a stretch.

BILL: *And what was your first professional job as a penciller?*

TOD: THE OMEGA MEN.

BILL: *How did that come about?*

TOD: It was a very fortunate break that it opened up when it did, when I was available. I got it because I'd done some inking for **Dick Giordano.** He was finishing up the special TEEN TITANS anti-drug issue, and the deadline was real tight, and he was busy with a lot of things, so he asked me to do some figures to help speed things along. So when I dropped off the pages he needed I took the opportunity to show him some pencilling I'd done on my own, and he said, "Yeah, that looks pretty good. It looks like you're just about ready." So a couple of weeks later I got a call from him saying, "We have an opening on a couple of books and we're looking for some people to fill them. You're a possibility. Bring your samples down to the office as soon as you can." So I did. The two books they needed a penciller for were STAR TREK and THE OMEGA MEN. I hoped to get on STAR TREK.

BILL: *Why not OMEGA MEN?*

TOD: Well, I was familiar with STAR TREK. I had seen THE OMEGA MEN but had never really warmed up to it. Artistically it was a real nice job, but I thought the violence and the tone of the book was too somber.

BILL: *So how did you end up doing OMEGA MEN?*

TOD: As it turned out, it had the "hotter" deadline. Between pencilling THE OMEGA MEN and THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, **Keith Giffen** had gotten very behind, to the point where he had to make a choice, "Which one am I going to devote full time to?" And he really wanted to stay with THE LEGION.

So **Giffen** left, and THE OMEGA MEN was getting later and later. There was a lot riding on the book — advertising on it was very big — and they didn't want to get too far behind, and lose credibility with the distributors. **Marv Wolfman,** the book's editor, needed a replacement for **Giffen** badly. He told me, "Do some sample pages and let me see how you

Pencils from OMEGA MEN #10.

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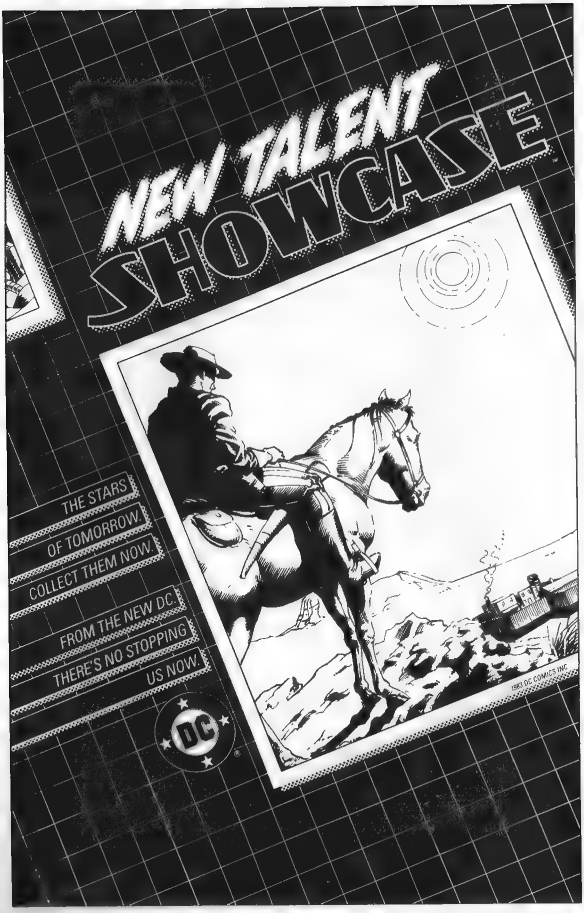
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"Jack Kirby said, 'Fight 'em if you have to."

handle the characters and the storytelling." So he gave me the script for issue #7, and I did a few pages for that, and he said, "Yeah, it looks pretty good. Keep going." He really didn't have much choice. I guess he had looked at some portfolios by other artists and really hadn't found what he was looking for, and he was getting desperate. So I got the book. That issue, anyway.

BILL: *And they asked you to stay on the book?*

TOD: They tried out other artists for the following issue, #8, and it was down to two of us, me and **Paul Powers,** who was from the West Coast and had done some animation work, I think, and backgrounds for **Alex Toth.** His credentials were very good, but his stuff had an animated-cartoon look and they were looking for a more **Kirby**-esque, break-in-through-the-wall, super-heroic kind of look. So I got issue #8, and they've kept me on the series since then.

BILL: *Now that Roger Slifer has left THE OMEGA MEN, will you be staying with it?*

TOD: I'm surprised you know that Roger's getting off the book. He just announced it a little while ago.

BILL: *We have our sources.*

TOD: Well, yes, I will be staying with THE OMEGA MEN for an indefinite amount of time. I'm a freelancer, so at any moment they could assign it to someone else, but **Marv Wolfman** is behind my work and is working with me to get it the way he wants it.

BILL: *You mentioned before that every editor has pet qualities that he's looking for. What would you say Marv is looking for?*

TOD: Backgrounds. *(Laughter.)* Backgrounds have become the stars. You should draw lots of machinery and lots of shiny doo-hickeys in the background. It sells a lot of books.

Seriously, I've worked with Roger more closely up to this point, so I know more of what Roger was looking for, and I haven't been working with Marv closely enough, yet, to put my finger on exactly what he likes and wants, but he does have a real good grounding in comics, and when I first met him he emphasized that he wanted a technical look to the backgrounds. This is popular nowadays. And, of course, that the characters should look and move the way they should. But he did give me a pretty free hand. One thing he said when he looked at my sample pages was, "I don't like slanted panels. I like your drawing, but don't use those angular panels. They make things hard to read."

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So I haven't done any angular panels. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *You mention that DC was looking for a "Kirby-esque" look. Do you think your work has that look?*

TOD: I hope so, because I work hard to put it there. I'm a big **Jack Kirby** fan. I think he's probably my favorite comic-book artist of all time. His style is different from mine, but I've learned a lot from his work. As far as dynamic super-hero storytelling goes, you can't beat him. I had the pleasure of meeting him last summer, and he was super.

BILL: *How did you meet him?*

TOD: I was at one of the New York Conventions, and he was going to be a speaker. I told someone I was looking forward to hearing him speak, and he said, "Oh, he's over there right now, signing books in the corner." There was a whole group of kids around him, pushing copies of THE FANTASTIC FOUR in his face, and he was being very nice to them, answering everyone's questions and signing copies of his books. When they finally cleared a space, I got to talk to him, and I just had the chance to say that I had always loved his work, and I asked him, "What would the best advice you could give someone coming into the comic-book field?" And he said, "Hang on to what's yours. Keep what's yours. Fight 'em if you have to, but they'll respect you for it."

After working with **Gil Kane,** when I was determined to work hard at my art and stayed up late at night, I studied what I call "The three Ks" — **Kirby, Kubert,** and **Kane.** If you've got a thorough knowledge of those three, you've got a real thorough grounding in comics.

BILL: *What do you admire about Joe Kubert?*

TOD: I respect his versatility. He's able to do super-hero work, and war comics, and westerns and science-fiction. And he does them all so well, each in his own unique way.

BILL: *Aren't there any of the new crop of artists who are among your favorites?*

TOD: Oh, sure. **Brian Bolland** for example. His CAMELOT 3000 work is great. His finished pencils look just like an inked page. An inker pretty much just has to pour ink over it and let the ink run into the cracks — that's how well his drawing is done. Unfortunately, he's getting the reputation for being slow. And that's crazy. Because no one can draw as well as he does and do two or three pages a day. It takes time to draw that well. And patience. A lot more than I have. *(Laughter.)*

Trevor Von Eeden is very good. Sometimes his layouts are a bit confusing to me. Sorry about that, Trevor, but your drawing is great! *(Laughter.)* **Jose Garcia Lopez** is excellent, too.

BILL: *What about artists who work for other companies, beside DC?*

TOD: I don't know a lot of 'em, because I don't follow their books. There are a lot of new companies, and a lot of new comics being produced. Unfortunately, a lot of new art coming out looks amateurish. A lot of guys have been into comics so long as fans that they feel they can just jump into being professionals. There aren't enough places for new artists to go for training — places like the Kubert School, or apprenticeships. And so the level of professionalism is just not as high as it should be. You need basic grounding. Competition will drive out a lot of these newcomers unless they get the basics down pat.

BILL: *Anything happening in comics now that you like?*

TOD: Let's see . . . I like the stuff that **Marv Wolfman** and **Gil Kane** have been doing in ACTION COMICS. Superman

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"Marv Wolfman said, 'I don't like slanted

is probably one of the all-time great creations of the art-form, but he hasn't always been done well in the comics. The stories have been well drawn but it's hard to write for an omnipotent character. I think he's a great character, of heroic proportions, and I would like to see him turned around and used really well. I think Marv and Gil are moving him in the right direction.

BILL: *What about your own characters, the Omega Men? Have you formed any opinions about them?*

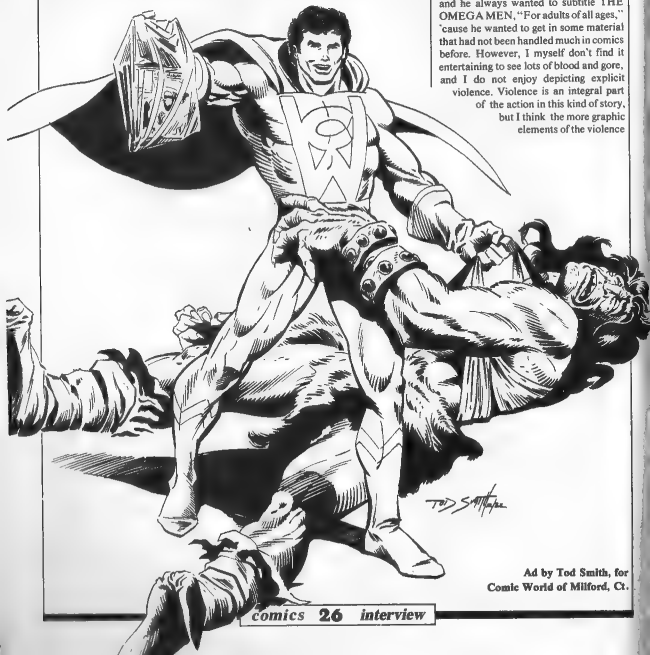
TOD: Well, my favorite is Broot. He's an interesting psychological profile. He's got all this power yet he wants to be peaceful. Tigorr is a good character, too, although I'd like to see other sides of him brought out. His aggressive side has been emphasized a lot, but I'd like to see him do something that would reflect another aspect of his personality.

BILL: *What new direction will THE OMEGA MEN be taking?*

TOD: One thing Marv plans to do is to bring the book closer into the family of DC books. We've talked about having Green Lantern in an issue as a guest-star, which I would love to do, since **Gil Kane's** GREEN LANTERN was one of my earliest influences. In one recent issue I pencilled, Marv had a tie-in with TEEN TITANS — Blackfire will guest-star in OMEGA MEN #11. When **Roger Slifer** was writing it, Marv pretty much had his hands full with other projects, and I think Roger and Keith had more or less a free hand to do what they wanted to with the book — which led to some of its probable difficulties, such as the graphic violence and the criticism it got over it. But I think Marv is going to be giving even more input into the book in future issues.

BILL: *What do you think of the criticism of THE OMEGA MEN as being too violent?*

TOD: I think it's legitimate. I know Roger has been trying to write something different from standard comic-book fare, and he always wanted to subtitle THE OMEGA MEN, "For adults of all ages," 'cause he wanted to get in some material that had not been handled much in comics before. However, I myself don't find it entertaining to see lots of blood and gore, and I do not enjoy depicting explicit violence. Violence is an integral part of the action in this kind of story, but I think the more graphic elements of the violence



Ad by Tod Smith, for Comic World of Milford, Ct.

panels. They make things hard to read."

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"Broot has all this power, yet he wants to be peaceful." Pencils from OMEGA MEN #10.

have turned a lot of people off. As I mentioned before, they turned me off — in the beginning the book did not appeal to me for just that reason. If Roger wants to write more hard-hitting, more realistic material — and I know he does — he needs to find another medium to write it in, or else a comic company with a different point of editorial view from DC.

BILL: *So, in the future, THE OMEGA MEN will be getting away from "graphic" violence?*

TOD: Yes, we hope to make it a more entertaining adventure-type book — still appealing to "adults of all ages," but with other kinds of material. Like, we're going into tits'n'ass in the next issue. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *Well, I can't wait, speaking for myself. As for yourself, what future plans do you have?*

TOD: I really don't know. I'm open to the future. I'd like to do some realistic, contemporary stuff, although fantasy is probably my favorite form because you get so much freedom to make things up. I'd like to do a romance story — a real humanistic man/woman story. I'd like to do all the different kinds of subject matter that can be done in the graphic, illustrative medium. I'd like to emulate **Joe Kubert** and be versatile in each *genre*, but it takes a lot of work.

BILL: *And a lot of* genres. *If superheroes are squeezing out, say, westerns and romance, it doesn't give you as many openings to do westerns or romance.*

TOD: No, it doesn't, and that's unfortunate because there are so many kinds of subject matter. You can treat anything interesting in a visual way if there's some kind of visual appeal. I would like to do a western — something that's really gritty and hard-hitting and dusty and leathery, and guns glinting in the sun, and men with stubble on their chins rolling their own cigarettes.

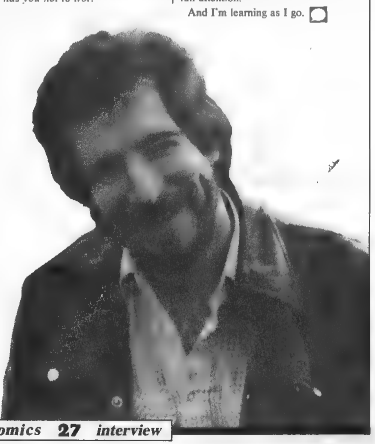
BILL: *And with weird strips of skin hanging off their lips.* (Laughter.)

TOD: Why is it when they do a western, they come up with something weird like JONAH HEX? I can't figure him out.

BILL: *Dave Kraft can't figure out why, when Jonah Hex gets into a fistfight, somebody doesn't just rip that strip of skin off his lips. It's such an obvious and appealing target. Anyway, besides these general aspirations to versatility, are there any concrete plans that you have for the future? Any particular project that has you hot to trot?*

TOD: No, not at this point. Right now, with THE OMEGA MEN, I really have my hands full. Besides being my first professional pencilling work ever, it's a book that's in the public eye — it's controversial..it's been publicized a great deal, and it's the first on-going series in a high-quality format. It's the focal point for a certain amount of attention in the field, and I'd like to know what people think of my work — for and against. Right now, I'm just giving THE OMEGA MEN my full attention, because it requires my full attention.

And I'm learning as I go.



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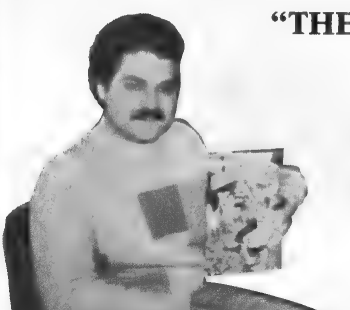

"THE OMEGA MEN tried to be different."

MIKE DECARLO

With both Roger Slifer and Keith Giffen leaving THE OMEGA MEN, a new penciller (Tod Smith) joining the team and a new direction being set for the book, we talked with THE OMEGA MEN's inker, Mike DeCarlo, to find out how all these changes were affecting him.

While speaking about THE OMEGA MEN shake-up, sharing his reflections on this and other facets of his life and work, Mike came across as intensely serious about his career and goals, earnestly involved in comics, yet good-humored about himself. I began by asking for his Vital Statistics . . .

MIKE DeCARLO: I batted .342 in 1974, when I was with the Yankees. *(Laughter.)*

BILL CHADWICK: *Do you pose for Jockey Shorts ads, too?*

MIKE: Once in a while, on the side. But I guess this isn't the kind of information you wanted. Okay, let's talk about comics.

BILL: *Well, let's talk specifically about THE OMEGA MEN, to start. Is it true that you'll be leaving the series?*

MIKE: No. To be quite honest, I did give a lot of thought to leaving it.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mike DeCarlo
Occupation: Self-employed artist
Residence: New Haven, Conn.
Born: New Haven, Conn. — 14 March 1957
Training: Dick Giordano's Comic Art School
Credits: THE WARLORD, DC COMICS PRESENTS, GREEN LANTERN, THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD, THE OMEGA MEN
Favorite Comic Book: THE FANTASTIC FOUR (You're going to get me in trouble with my company.)
Favorite Comic Character: The Thing (You're going to get me in trouble again.)
Favorite Penciller-Inker Team: Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott
Favorite President: John F. Kennedy
Favorite Actor and Actress: Faye Dunaway and Dustin Hoffman

BILL: *Why?*

MIKE: Because I had been getting a little disenchanted. When **Keith Giffen** left, that was disappointing. That's no reflection on **Tod Smith** — I just enjoyed working with Keith so much. Then **Roger Slifer** talked about leaving — and as far as I know, he's definitely going to be leaving after issue #13 — and that was disappointing too, and put a further crimp in my enthusiasm for the book. And there was a lot of bad press about the violence in THE OMEGA MEN, and it seemed to be concurrent with a steady drop in sales. So I started to wonder if maybe it just wasn't the book for me.

Now I've decided just to take two issues off — probably issues #14 and #15 — then return to THE OMEGA MEN and pretty much stay on as inker permanently.

BILL: *Why did you decide to return to it?*

MIKE: I began to get more enthused with what Tod was doing. And I began to realize that I was a pretty large part of the book — as large a part as an inker can play. And it doesn't happen very often that you can get in on a book with the first issue and be able to stay with it. Also, I

"I felt that the outcry over the

realized I would kind of miss the book if I did leave.

If I had started THE OMEGA MEN today, on issue #10 or issue #20 or something else, I might have left. But because I was from issue #1 on, I really felt obligated, in a certain way, to stay on it, to keep what I do in the book. Because I feel my inking is an integral part of it, to be honest.

BILL: *How do you react to the criticism of the violence in THE OMEGA MEN?*

MIKE: Well, I think it's a little exaggerated. I think THE OMEGA MEN was trying to take some different steps. It wasn't just the violence. It was a lot of the political over- and under-tones in Roger's writing. I think THE OMEGA MEN tried to be different, and when you try to be different, there's always going to be a select few who are going to come out and put it down. I wasn't thrilled with some of the violence, but I also felt that the outcry over it was a bit overblown.

BILL: *You say that your inking is an integral part of THE OMEGA MEN. Do you feel the readers appreciate the role an inker plays in a comic?*

MIKE: No, not as much as they should. I feel inking is an overlooked aspect of comics. That's been improving in the last five years, with the impact of people like **Terry Austin** and **Klaus Janson,** and older people like **Joe Sinnott** and **Dick Giordano,** but I don't think people realize that the final look of the book is really the inker's responsibility.

BILL: *How do you see the inker's role?*

MIKE: I sort of look at the penciller as the storyteller. The style of the drawing — a lot of the nuances that go into the art — is what the inker can put in. Inking isn't just tracing lines with ink. Some inkers just do that, of course, but the good ones don't.

I'm not saying what the inker does is as important as what the penciller does. Obviously we can't make the same impact as a **Byrne** or a **Perez** or a **Giffen.** But it is important. You could take a great penciller and match him up with a poor inker, and you wouldn't have a good piece of art any more. I've seen **Dick Giordano** take some junk and make it a really presentable piece of artwork.

BILL: *Do you consider it a hard job?*

MIKE: Yes, and we're usually under the gun as far as deadlines are concerned. And if something is wrong with the drawings, the inkers are the ones who usually take the heat for it.

BILL: *Have you always appreciated the inker's role yourself?*

MIKE: Even when I was growing up and reading comics, I knew that there was that added aspect to comic art. I knew, for instance, that when **Jack Kirby** was inked by **Joe Sinnott,** it just looked so much better. And when **Neal Adams** was inked by **Dick Giordano** it was just *so* good. And I was always conscious of it, unlike my friends, who didn't care who inked a book. Maybe that's why I am where I am today, inking comic-books.

BILL: *Are you any relation to the other DeCarlos in comics?*

MIKE: No, no relation to any of them.

BILL: *How did you get into the field?*

MIKE: I saw a newspaper ad in 1977 stating that a DC artist needed an assistant. So I answered the ad and sent in my portfolio, and got the job. The artist turned out to be **Frank McLaughlin.** I had never thought of myself as an inker *per se,* but Frank did inking exclusively and this was my chance to get into the field, so I naturally went into inking. I had some notions of being a penciller, but after working for Frank for about a year, followed by working as **Dick Giordano's** inking assistant for about a year and a half, my penciling aspirations got put on the back-burner for a while. But someday — hopefully in a year or two — I'll get a chance to pencil a full book by myself, perhaps with some new characters.

BILL: *Of your own creation?*

MIKE: Not necessarily — although that

"Sampling of my pencilling, with my inks. A character of my own creation."

©1983 Mike DeCarlo

violence was a bit overblown."

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From this year's BATMAN ANNUAL — Mike Golden layouts, Mike DeCarlo finished inks.

would be a preference. I'd hate to follow up someone like **John Byrne** or **George Perez** on a book that's well established, because sometimes, no matter how good you are, there's always the old favorite from the past that you can never quite live up to. I wouldn't mind starting fresh, with my own group of characters.

BILL: *Who are some old favorites of yours?*

MIKE: Jack Kirby. The man left such an impact on my life — I don't think anybody has been as taken by his art as I was. He did so much, and of such quality, that to this day, I can't believe what he did. It's just mind-boggling. How someone could have such talent stored up inside him and just perform month after month at such a high level is amazing to me. There are pages and panels from THE FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR and CAPTAIN AMERICA, from fifteen or twenty years ago, that I could probably draw by memory to this day. There are guys today like **Jose Garcia Lopez** and **John Buscema** and **Neal Adams** who are so much more technically refined than **Kirby** was, but the dynamics in his artwork have never been equalled.

BILL: *I gather you think highly of Keith Giffen, too.*

MIKE: I found him one of the more refreshing pencillers I've ever worked with. There was something more involved that just what he put down on paper. From the first page of his that I inked, I felt an immediate affinity with him that I've very seldom experienced with any other penciller. That's why, when he left THE OMEGA MEN, it was kind of a shock.

I've just begun to find that affinity with **Tod Smith's** work. Once again, it's no reflection on Tod's work, but I didn't find any immediate affinity with it. I'm not sure exactly why. His stuff was very good, he came in on a tight situation, he followed an extremely "hot" penciller, and he did a good job from the start. But now that I'm on the sixth issue we've done together, I'm starting to understand the way he thinks. It's coinciding with the way I ink, so I'm really starting to get into a nice groove with Tod.

BILL: *You mentioned doing a book of your own. Any idea of what kind of book you'd like to do?*

MIKE: I do have a lot of thoughts on the subject. I'm not entirely satisfied with inking because I have some stories to tell, and you can't do that with inking. I'd like to touch a little more delicately on Good and Evil, and man's interrelation with his environment, and with man's ethnocentrism, which is a lot of crap in many ways. I'd like to come up with a character that's dynamic enough to grab a twelve year old kid, yet go past just slugging it out or flying through space. I'd like to hit home a little bit — without being preachy — and make all of us look at each other — and ourselves — more closely. But do it in a super-hero context. THE SILVER SURFER tried to do it in the late 1960s and early '70s, but not with tremendous success. I'd like to do something like that, only do it a little more successfully.

BILL: *Beyond the ideas you've just told me, are there any definite projects on your horizon other than THE OMEGA MEN?*

MIKE: Well, something that I'm doing right now that I'm pretty excited about is a BATMAN ANNUAL that I'm working on. **Michael Golden** is doing the pencils,

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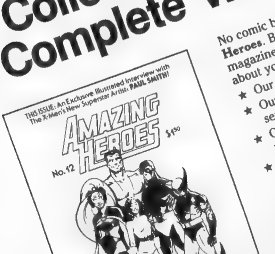

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"I did give a lot of thought about leaving."

and inked 14 or 15 of the 40 pages. I'm inking the others, working from breakdowns. Trying to get in there and give it the quality that **Michael Golden** can give the art is a real challenge to me. Sometimes you don't get a chance to show what you can really do, usually because you're in a rush to get things done. But this annual will come out around the beginning of the new year, and I've been able to spend some time on it here and there, and really sink my teeth into it. What Michael gave me to work with is so elegant that it's really inspired me. I think it's the best work I've done in my life.

BILL: *Have you ever considered working for some of the other companies?*

MIKE: Yes. I have considered working for Marvel especially. It's kind of tough to say because I have always been treated very well at DC — that's not just blowing smoke. It's the truth. They respect me and treat me as well as any inker they have, and I consider people like **Dick Giordano** and **Karen Berger** and **Marv Wolfman** and quite a few others to be my friends. But you can't ever get your childhood likes out of you, and when I was a kid in the 1960s, I read nothing but Marvel comics. I was very enamored of their characters. Not that I didn't appreciate Superman, or Batman, or the Teen Titans. But someday I'd really like to work on Spider-Man or Thor or the Fantastic Four, because the roots are so strong inside me that I really feel I'd be missing something if I didn't work on those characters just one time.

BILL: *Well, speaking of Marvel characters, it has been reported that various Marvel super-heroes have been sighted as "hidden guest-stars" in THE OMEGA MEN. Is that true?*

MIKE: *(Laughter.)* Oh, yeah. There's probably been a dozen of them. The Hulk's been in it, The Thing's been in it, Iron Man and Spider-Man have been in it.

BILL: *Has DC caught on?*

MIKE: No one's said anything to me about it. If they've noticed it, they've chalked it up to my peculiarities and left it at that. Besides, I put Batman in the book once, too.

BILL: *Could you give our sharp-eyed readers a clue which issues these characters appear in, so they can hunt for them?*

MIKE: No, I think I'll just let people find them. It'll be more fun.

BILL: *Our spies report that Charlie Brown is on the cover of OMEGA MEN # 8.*

MIKE: Yes, Charlie Brown has been trying to expand his world from the comic-strip pages to comic books. I give him a little assist once in a while.

BILL: *"Once in a while"? You mean he's been there before?*

MIKE: Oh, he's been in there a few times.

BILL: *Has he been a "hidden guest-star" in other books you've done?*

MIKE: No, I think I've limited Charlie Brown's appearances to THE OMEGA MEN. He likes that book the best.

Splash from OMEGA MEN #12

HEART POUNDING, LEGS PUMPING, THE FRIGHTENED OMEGA MAN FLEES HIS PURSUERS!
MOMENTARILY, HE HAD ESCAPED THEIR NEFARIOUS CLUTCHES, BUT NOW THEY CLOSE IN ONCE MORE...
C'MON, SHLAGEN--WHAT'RE YOU SO AFRAID OF?
YES, DEAR, LET US SHOW YOU WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER.
SINCE YOU'RE A FRIEND OF MAMA'S THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY CHARGE!
J-JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!
ROGER SLIFER · TODD SMITH & MIKE DECARLO
WRITER
ARTISTS
STORYTELLERS

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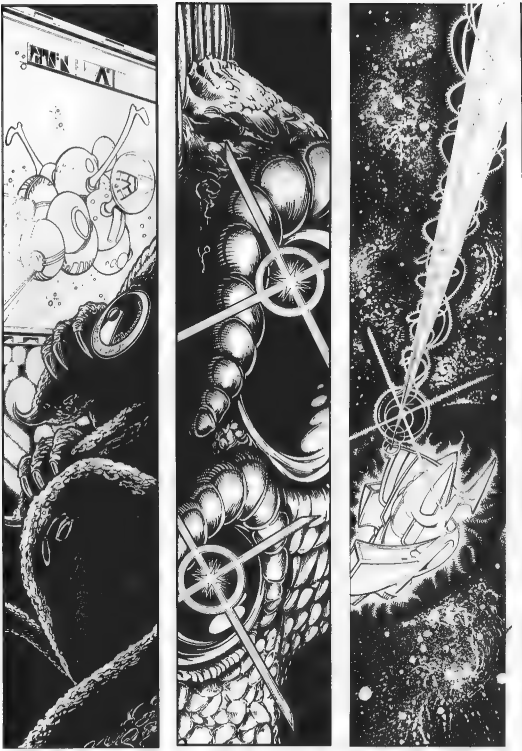
DARC TANGENT

BY FOGLIO AND FREFF



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INKED BY JOE GIELLA!

THIRD GREAT ISSUE ON SALE FEBRUARY 7, 1984! WRITTEN AND PENCILED BY ALAN KUPPERBERG!
INKED BY BRIAN MOORE!

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"I'm really sick of super-hero comics."

Photo: Ron Fortes

JACK ABEL

Despite the fact that Jack Abel has been working in comics for over 30 years, drawing such characters as Gunner and Sarge, the Hulk, Superman, and the Legion of Super-Heroes, he is one of the least known artists in the business. In fact, this interview is the first one conducted with Jack Abel to ever see print. Jack noted that he was once interviewed several years ago, but that it was never printed.

The interview took place on a Friday afternoon in the late, lamented Marvel lunchroom (now Denny O'Neil's office), which was fortunately quiet and deserted. Given a chance to talk about himself, Jack held forth on such subjects as attending the Hogarth school along with such classmates as Rocky Mastroserio, Marie Severin, Mike Esposito and Wally Wood, and what it was like doing comics in the days before creators' rights were even a twinkle in the publishers' eyes.

DAK: *We did an interview with Terry Austin, in COMICS INTERVIEW #1, and ran a bunch of panels that had the "ABEL-CHAYKIN MURDER CASE." Do you remember the genesis of that? Where did it spring from?*

JACK ABEL: It sprang from the twisted mind of **Terry Austin**, no doubt about that. The first time it ever appeared, I believe, was in the SPIDER-MAN/SUPERMAN thing. **Terry Austin** was doing the backgrounds, and there was a panel with a newspaper lying flat on a desk, and rather than say, you know, some headline that's current, he lettered a headline with something about **Abel** murdering **Chaykin.**

DAK: *What drove him to that?*

JACK: There was always a lot of what I considered friendly bantering between me and **Chaykin** up at the studio. You know, on my part there was never any dislike for **Howard.** Maybe other guys got the impression that we were less than friendly . . .

DAK: *(Laughing) Mortal enemies.*

JACK: . . . but it was just both our styles to insult people we liked, and maybe **Terry**, being new in the business, could have gotten the idea that **Howard** and I didn't get along, which was not the truth at all. And so he made up this thing about me murdering **Howard** and being tried for the murder, and then convicted, then sentenced and paroled, and this whole story was told in about three or four newspaper headlines. But as I said, it's all

"I was not that well-thought-of at DC

from the demented, twisted thought processes of **Terry Austin.**

DAK: *For the record. (Laughter.) Of all the people you've inked over the years, whose pencils did you really like working on? Who stood out?*

JACK: I enjoyed doing THE HULK with **Herb Trimpe,** a lot. **Trimpe** is of the **Jack Kirby** school, which, believe it or not, I'm not one of the great admirers of, although I can see why it was successful. But **Trimpe** did a completely professional job, and anyone who does that is easy to ink. He put down in pencil what was supposed to be there — no scribbles, everything sharply defined, easy to ink. His style of drawing was not my style of drawing, but then you can't have everything.

I inked two **Jack Kirby** covers, that's all the **Jack Kirby** I've ever inked, but then, he is from the same school — **Jack's** school. His covers are relatively easy to ink. I'm basically lazy, and as you might have detected, I like to ink stuff that's easy to ink. I'm not interested in how artistic it looks when it's finished. It's going to look professionally good if I ink it, but if I can get to that point in less time, it makes me happy.

STEVE: *I understand you used to ink entirely with a brush.*

JACK: Yes, when I first started inking. I was aware that other inkers were using a pen to do outlining, backgrounds and stuff, but I did everything with a brush — buildings, cars, etc.

STEVE: *Freehand, or ruled?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jack Abel
Occupation: Comic Book Artist; Inker, Penciller, *Raconteur, Bon Vivant* with the strange ability to cloud men's minds.
Residence: Flushing, Queens
Born: Harlem, New York City — 15 July 1927
Credits: OUR ARMY AT WAR, SUPERMAN, THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, THE HULK, MASTER OF KUNG FU, IRON MAN, TALES OF THE GREEN BERET.
Training: Attended Burne Hogarth's Cartoonists and Illustrators School from 1948-1951.
Favorite Comic: TWO-FISTED TALES
Favorite President: FDR
Favorite Pen Point: Hunt's Crocquil 102
Favorite Ball Player: Joe DiMaggio
Least Favorite Aspect of Drawing Comics: Erasing the pages after they're inked.

JACK: I had learned to rule with a brush.

STEVE: *I've seen people do it and it looks difficult.*

JACK: It is. I haven't done it in twenty-odd years. I learned to do it at C & I. I don't know who taught me how to do it — it might have been **Jerry Robinson;** he was my instructor for quite a while. I don't even know how I got into using pen. But I did, and for a long while I hardly used brush at all. I thought it was a waste of time to put the pen down and pick up a brush. In those days, we were so involved, with time being money, in cranking out as many pages as we could, we got kind of "formula-ized," using methods that would expedite finishing a lot of pages.

DAK: *Who were some of your classmates at C & I?*

JACK: Well, one person was **Marie Severin.** We've always been friends, but I didn't know her really well. At that time in my life, I was more aware of an age difference. **Marie** is four or five years younger than me. Most of the guys, including me, were veterans of the service and were anywhere from twenty to thirty years old, trying to put our lives together and find our life's work. Whereas **Marie** was no more than seventeen or eighteen at the time. But she sat in front of me, and probably joked around, because **Marie** was always an extroverted person and easy to get along with. She was probably the only one in the school at the time not going there under the G.I. Bill, where they subsidized your tuition if you were a veteran.

STEVE: *Who else were some of your classmates?*

JACK: Well, it's been over thirty years, but I think **Ross Andru, Wally Wood** was going to the school, and I knew him, but I don't believe he was in my class. **Roy Krenkel, Mike Esposito, Al Williamson.**

THAT SCREAM SOUNDED ALMOST ... HUMAN!
HEY...OOCH... HOW ABOUT ME? I JUST GOT THE GRAND-DADDY OF ALL HOT-FOOTS!
YOU'D BETTER GIVE ROCKY A HAND, RED...

The Challengers of the Unknown, as inked by Abel. From DC's SUPER TEAM FAMILY #9.

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at that time, probably deservedly so."

STEVE: *Wasn't Williamson just a kid then?*

JACK: He probably was only two years younger than me, but when you are twenty and a kid is eighteen, you generally don't hang out with him. But I remember he was very talented. Then there was **Moe Marcus.** We were a team for a long time; we did a lot of things for Fox.

DAK: *Were they your first professional jobs?*

JACK: No, not quite. My first professional job was filling in solid black areas in the ant. I've seen some kids and interns doing that today. I've seen **Joe Rubenstein** using that method with kids. He'll put an"X" in areas and they'll fill in the blacks.

I got that job through a friend of mine who was sitting alongside me at C & I — a guy named **Rocky Mastroserio.** I don't know if you've heard of him —

STEVE: *Oh, sure, I used to read his stuff.*

JACK: He was a good artist and a friend of mine. Anyway, he had some contacts at Fox, and he asked me if I was interested in doing a little work, helping him out. I said, "Sure." I had just gotten married two weeks before and was anxious to start making a living. So that was how I got started in comics as a professional.

DAK: *You and Moe Marcus did some work for Crestwood back then, didn't you?*

JACK: Yes, we did a western — I forget what it was called. They had some really good artists up there at the time.

STEVE: *Like who?*

JACK: Mort Meskin, Jack Kirby, Marv Stein — a helluva good artist —**Bill Draut, John Severin** and **Elder,** neither of whom I have ever met, but they were a team. At that time I was extremely impressed with **Elder's** inking because I was an inker, basically. I had never tried pencilling at that point, because inking seemed such an easy way to make a buck. I sort of took to it naturally. Pencilling required knowledge and practice and a kind of stick-to-it-iveness which I didn't have at the time, but which I later developed.

A year or two later in that same era I saw **Severin's** stuff at EC that he inked himself, and I was amazed that he was that good an inker. He was every bit as good as **Elder,** perhaps better — but that's a matter of taste, I suppose. They are both terrific artists.

DAK: *What particularly do you like about Severin?*

JACK: Well, he is probably the most meticulous of artists in terms of authenticity. I've seen stuff that he has inked over pencillers who didn't do the proper amount of research, in terms of weapons and military equipment, and the finished result was that when **Severin** inked it, it looked real.

I always did think that **Severin's** inks over **Trimpe's** HULK pencils were really incredible. Of course, as I know from working with him, **Trimpe** is a stickler for authenticity himself, and really knows equipment and weaponry. I am thinking particularly of one HULK story where the Hulk was in a parallel dimension where World War II was going on; I thought that it was about as good artwork as I have ever seen. At that time — around 1972 — I was sharing a studio with **Wally Wood,** and Woody was extremely impressive, too.

STEVE: *Did you ever do any jobs with Woody?*

JACK: No. Woody and I didn't see each other for a long, long time. We used to go into a bar on 89th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, near C & I. All the guys from C & I used to hang out there, watch the

Michael Golden drawings inked by Jack Abel. From BATMAN #303.

"...AND I COVER IT FAST... BUT NOT FAST ENOUGH!"
"THE WORDS ECHOING BETWEEN THE GRIMY BUILDINGS STRIKE ME LIKE BLOWS..."
YOU CAN GET LOST, PUNK--!
-- THE EVIDENCE IN THIS CASE WILL PROVE THE SAINTLY DO-GOODER ANGUS ARKAME WAS REALLY A MURDERER!
YOU STOLE IT! YOU HAD NO RIGHT--!
SO SUE ME... BUT WHEN I SPLASH IT ON THE FRONT PAGE, I'LL MAKE ME IN THE NEWS BUSINESS!
THEY'LL GOBBLE IT UP ON THE SUBWAYS!
GIVE ME!
STAY WAY, OR...
BLAM
BLAM
"IGNORING THE LEAD BURNING HIS INSIDES, BUZZY LURCHES FORWARD, HIS ENORMOUS WEIGHT SLAMMING INTO MARTY RAIL...."
"I REACH FOR HIM... TRY DESPERATELY, TO SAVE HIM -- BUT...."
7

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GRAPHIC NOVEL #9 FROM MARVEL COMICS ON SALE IN DECEMBER

"Inking seemed an easy way to make a buck."

fights and drink beer until we got too disgusting and they threw us out. Then we'd go over to **Moe Marcus'** home — he used to have this huge Bronx apartment that his parents had given up to buy a farm, and he had it all by himself — and we would sit there all night and work on pages, and listen to Symphony Sid, a jazz disc-jockey of the time. We were young. It was a nice time. Kind of fun.

DAK: *In your formative years, who did you admire?*

JACK: When I was in high school, I thought **Will Eisner, Lou Fine** — who also worked on THE BLUE BEETLE for a time — and **Reed Crandall** were giants. I've never had the opportunity to meet any of them, and of course, **Fine** and **Crandall** are dead now. But God, I liked **Eisner's** stuff when I was young. I still do! "Time has not diminished his infinite variety."

STEVE: *What did you do when a lot of companies went out of business in the mid-Fifties?*

JACK: There were only a few left. I was luckier than most. When Marvel suspended production in '57, I had been working at DC. Not a lot. I was not that well-known or well-thought-of at DC at that time, probably deservedly so, since I wasn't that good in those days. But I worked around. I got some jobs from CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED. At that time, or maybe a little after, I happened to be in touch with **Dick Giordano**, who was the editor at Charlton. They were glad to pay me $20.00 a page for a pencil and ink job.

STEVE: *When did you start inking your own pencils?*

JACK: In 1956, when I was beginning to work for DC. I had been working there for a couple of months with a penciller named **Bob Forgione** — a lot of war and mystery stuff. **Forgione** had a knock-down drag-out disagreement with **Bob Kanigher,** the DC war-book editor, and quit. So **Kanigher** called me up and asked me if I wanted to go on with the material, pencilling and inking. I had only been inking at that point. But I said, "Sure, I'll give it a try." I was so insecure that I had a professional penciller do some breakdowns for me. I wasn't happy with the way they looked. So I said, "I have to jump in, and if I drown," I drown. I jumped in and I swam. I don't think I ever worried **Joe Kubert** or **Russ Heath,** who I considered top guys up there, but **Kanigher** seemed happy with my work.

STEVE: *Did you ever work with Joe Kubert?*

JACK: As a matter of fact, yes, I inked two SGT. ROCK jobs, and I inked some of Joe's GREEN BERET newspaper strips, the one **Robin Moore** wrote. At first I inked the dailys and the Sundays, then it got to be too big a job, taking longer than I'd anticipated. And I kind of wimped out and asked Joe, "How about me inking it only on Sundays?" He said okay. I don't remember what finally happened, whether I quit or Joe fired me, but I probably quit.

STEVE: *While you were doing it, did you try to imitate his style?*

NOW THE KID'S AIMLESS RIDING GAINS PURPOSE, AS HE SPOTS THE CRACKLING FLAMES OF A RAGING FIRE...
THAT BOY BELOW! -- HE NEEDS HELP!
EEEE-HYAAH!

Jack Abel pencils inked by Al Milgrom. From Seaboard's WESTERN ACTION #1, starring the Comanche Kid.

JACK: There was hardly any other way to do it. I tried my best, but years later I looked at some of the strips that I saved, and in my opinion, I failed miserably. I don't think it was bad, particularly, but it just wasn't **Joe Kubert.** The inking wasn't compatible with the pencilling. I still think Joe's inking is just perfect.

STEVE: *Is he your favorite inker?*

JACK: Well, he is certainly in the top five percent, that's for sure! Maybe my favorite, I don't know. I differentiate Joe

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"Mine was the first generation that went into

from my favorite penciller-inkers, like **Dick Giordano** or **Joe Sinnott,** who can both draw like gangbusters but generally ink over other people's pencils. Then there are guys like **Joe Kubert** and **Russ Heath,** who are great inkers, but who generally just ink their own stuff. I've seen guys who are great inkers on their own stuff who ink other guys' stuff and it doesn't come out all that good — I'm thinking of **Russ Heath,** who can draw and render a Tiger tank so real you think you can reach out and touch it, but I saw him ink somebody else's pencils, and I was unimpressed.

STEVE: *While we're touching upon your DC days, didn't you know Harry Harrison back then?*

JACK: Yes. I had done some love-story jobs for Harry, who was working for one of those fly-by-night outfits. Later he became famous as a science-fiction author. He wrote the story SOYLENT GREEN. He was one of my classmates, and started out as a cartoonist, working with **Wally Wood.**

STEVE: *What was Harrison like back then?*

JACK: A nice crazy guy like most of us. Kind of, well . . . I say this with no malice . . . comic people are a little nutty, using "nutty" in a non-pejorative sense. I include me, of course. We were the kind of kids who, in the Forties, didn't stop seeing the Serials when we turned thirteen or fourteen. We continued. We'd find dumpy little movie houses that showed them. We were into fantasy and science-fiction stories, and when most kids stopped reading comic books, we continued.

STEVE: *So you sort of stayed a kid and kept having fun with the stuff.*

JACK: I think if you ask my wife she'll tell you I still am a kid. That is probably true of most men. Most men do stay kids. And I think *all* men who are in comics stay kids. You kind of have to. That is one thing that displeases me about comics today, they don't seem to be aimed at kids any more. They're getting a little esoteric.

Not that I only read kid stuff. I have always thought of myself as a well-read guy. I've always read other things besides comics. I used to read a lot of mystery stories . . . **Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett.** And I used to read BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY, and **Edgar Rice Burroughs.** A lot of guys stop reading **Burroughs** when they are fifteen years old and start reading **Joseph Conrad** and **Ernest Hemingway.** And **Conrad** and **Hemingway** are great, tremendous. But comic book people, even my generation, have always felt . . . I think I have always felt — "What the hell, we can read WAR AND PEACE, and then read ACTION COMICS, and enjoy both of them."

Jack Abel's pencils inked by Wally Wood for Red Circle's SORCERY #10.

STEVE: *I've always felt that way myself.*

JACK: You have only felt that for as old as you are. I've felt that way since I was fifteen years old. That is a helluva long time. And I've *said* it, but never where people were going to read it.

STEVE: *Now they are going to.*

JACK: Well, I have always been reluctant to try to influence people's thinking. That takes a certain amount of *chutzpah,* which I don't really have. I've always felt that "Free advice is worth the price" — which is nothing. That is why you will never see me telling a young kid who has been in the business an hour or so —

STEVE: *Like me.*

JACK: — how to do whatever he is doing and do it right, unless he asks me directly.

DAK: *You also worked for Seaboard.*

JACK: Yes, seems like everybody did. I even did some penciling for them. I did some work on a western with **Al Migrom.** It was called THE COMANCHE KID. It lasted, I believe, one issue. Like most of Seaboard's characters, he was a weak rip-off of a Marvel character, impossible to distinguish from THE RAWHIDE KID, THE APACHE KID, the KID-KID. Then they had WULF, a bare-faced rip-off of CONAN. I did one of the best drawing jobs I ever did in my life, for WULF, and it never got published.

STEVE: *Did you get paid?*

JACK: Oh, yes. Handsomely, I might add. It paid for a vacation I took in Florida, in 1975. And when I got back, eager to do some more for them, I was told that Seaboard or Atlas was out of business. They gave up the ghost. I always thought that **Mr. Goodman** should have given it a little better shot than he did. I thought it might have been a good thing for the comics business to have another publisher . . . not that their stuff compared with what Marvel was doing at the time.

DAK: *Tell us about the Golden Age stuff you worked on . . . the stuff that was found in the warehouse.*

JACK: Well, this guy **Israel Waldman,** who had Waldman Publications, formed Skywald with **Sol Brodsky** — the "Sky" from **Brodsky** and the "Wald" from **Waldman.** But before that . . . maybe in the early Sixties . . . this guy **Waldman** used to buy previously-published material that was in warehouses. He bought warehouses full of returned comics that had no covers on them, and he needed covers. So **Mike Esposito** and **Sol Brodsky** asked me if I wanted to earn some extra money pencilling and inking covers for this guy **Waldman,** whom I never met. And Mike and I would submit sketches — twenty at a time, or something like that — and Sol would pick out some, and say, "Do these," and we'd do a complete pencil-and-ink job.

DAK: *What titles did you do covers for?*

JACK: The only one I remember that still

comics to stay and make it their life's work."

survives is PLASTIC MAN. And there were some old Fiction House jungle titles — KANGA and SHEENA, remember them? — and other titles left over from the Forties. And Waldman had just glommed on to them somehow, literally buying them by the ton, apparently very cheaply — old, old comic-books with no covers.

STEVE: *How were they sold, the ones you did covers for?*

JACK: I believe what he did was distribute them in really low-class stores — real cheap stores like tacky versions of Woolworth's. He put them into cellophane bags, like three or four at a time, and sold them three for a quarter — but you had to buy the envelope of all three, so you were really buying "a pig in a poke."

STEVE: *You mentioned doing some work for Fawcett. How much work did you do for them?*

JACK: Just a thing I did with **Arthur Peddy.** We used to work together in a studio for Fawcett, Ziff-Davis, etc. That would have been in the Fifties. For Fawcett we did YOUNG EAGLE, a western about an Indian. It was done in an embryonic period and at the time, I thought it was quite good. In 1959, I moved to where I live now and threw out everything I had done up to that time. Every remnant, every relic.

STEVE: *You threw out original pages?*

JACK: All I had was copies of the books in which the stuff was printed. We didn't start getting original pages back until years later. In those days originals were put in warehouses, or just cut up, as a matter of course. I haven't sold any original pages in years. I don't want to get into that.

STEVE: *When did you leave DC for Marvel?* .

JACK: It was done in stages. In 1965, I did some inking for IRON MAN under the name **Gary Michaels,** but I still considered DC to be *the* big publisher of comics, and I didn't want to jeopardize my position there doing too much work for Marvel. I was inking SUPERMAN up at DC, and THE LEGION, and after a while I found that I wasn't inking SUPERMAN and THE LEGION. Due to the ex-publisher of DC Comics, probably, **John Verpoorten** was head of production up at Marvel at the time, and he asked me if I would be interested in doing some work for him. I almost jumped into his lap because I wasn't getting very much work. So I inked a couple of DAREDEVILs over **Gene Colan,** over whom I inked IRON MAN in the middle Sixties.

STEVE: *Did you like working over Colan's pencils?*

JACK: I loved it. Because **Colan** is a helluva good artist. And his pencils were finished and ready to be inked. But two or three years later I had the opportunity to ink DRACULA and I found he was putting less in. Maybe he thinks he wasn't, but the inker knows. It was a little more difficult to ink.

STEVE: *Were the figures more shapeless?*

JACK: No, just not as finished. But then hardly anyone these days does really finished pencils. Which is okay because I don't *mind* working harder.

DAK: *Besides a lack of finished pencils, how else has the business changed?*

JACK: It is a little different now with contracts. Freelancers have all kinds of benefits now — being covered by a hospitalization plan and a major medical plan is relatively new for freelance artists, and when you think about it we should have done it all along. In the early Sixties, when I was at DC, I asked several people about medical coverage, and I was always told the same thing, that it would entail an unusual amount of bookkeeping. It was years later that it occurred to me, "Well, who the hell gives a shit about bookkeepers?!" Freelance artists are the creative people that make this business go. We create the product that created DC and Marvel Comics. The bookkeeper was covered by a medical plan, but the artist was not! Isn't that incredible?

DAK: *How do you perceive that the*

Panel inked by Jack Abel, for SUPERBOY #10.

MEANWHILE...
CAREFUL—THAT VOLCANO IS DOING A GOOD IMITATION OF HELL!
NO SWEAT, NURA... LITERALLY! BRAINY'S FORCE SHIELD IS KEEPING THE ROCKS OFF US--
--AND I'M USING MY POWER TO ABSORB THE HEAT WITHIN THE SHIELD!
THAT LEAVES ELEMENT LAD AND ME FREE TO SEARCH!

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"All men who are in comics stay kids."

HIT 'EM HARD, WONDER WOMAN!
SHATTER THEM INTO SO MANY PIECES THAT THE FRAGMENTS CAN'T REGROUP!
SMACK!
POW!
BLAM!
IT'S NO USE, SUPERMAN--WE'RE NOT EVEN PUTTING A DENT IN THEM!
NO, EARTHER--FOR I AM STRONGER NOW...AND AS I TRAVEL NORTH...
...I WILL GROW STRONGER STILL!

© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Art from DC COMICS PRESENTS #4, inked by Abel.

comics world has changed over the years?

JACK: The only thing that occurs to me immediately is that the entire comic-book world appears to be run by a more youthful group. People who were fans are now the movers and shakers of comics. The important people in comics now were, ten or fifteen years ago, fans in junior high school, or even grade school. When I got into comic books it seemed that every editor was kind of an old fogey who had been around for years, and a lot of them had gone into comics after being in other parts of the publishing business, either science-fiction — like **Mort Weisinger** or **Julie Schwartz** — or some other field. Mine was the first generation that went into comics to stay in comics and make it their life's work. And I think this continues, with guys who are in comics because they love comics.

STEVE: *Do you still enjoy comics? Are they fun to do?*

JACK: Truthfully, no. I kind of hate to say that, because at one time I really loved doing it. I suppose the reason why I don't enjoy doing them now is a lack of variety in comics. They're almost all the same *genre*, maybe slightly different but not all that different. Frankly, I miss doing crime, cop-and-robbers, westerns, romance stories, eerie mystery stories, things like that. I'm really sick of super-hero comics. It was okay when they first came out — they revived the comic book business. Twenty years ago, it was at its lowest ebb.

STEVE: *Was that because of the censorship hassles in the Fifties?*

JACK: I think so. I think that **Dr. Wertham** probably did more harm to comics than any half-dozen pencillers or inkers I can think of. I don't know why he did it. He probably went to his grave thinking he was carring on a holy crusade, but all he managed to do was interrupt our livelihood. Not one charge that he made in any of his very provocatively-titled books — which I won't mention here — had any basis in reality that I can think of. In general, his putting-down of the entire industry, and the people who worked in it, I found to be — to quote my friend, Daffy Duck — "Dithpicable." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *How do you think the world has changed since those days?*

JACK: Let's see — we were on the brink of destruction then, and still are. I was just coming of age when McCarthyism was rearing what I consider its ugly head. I was kind of a liberal, and most of the people I knew were. I'm still against ignorance and bigotry. I know people who go so far as to say we're seeing a kind of fascism today, but I don't believe it. People who say that don't know what real fascism was like.

DAK: *Have your interests changed much over the years?*

JACK: Not that much. What I liked and loved in 1949, I still do, and the things I hated I probably still hate.

DAK: *Such as . . . ?*

JACK: Well, I loved my wife, and baseball, and still do. I didn't have any kids in 1949, but I do now, and love them. And I still love good western movies, which are extremely rare now. The only good ones you see made twenty-five or thirty years ago. They don't make them like that anymore. I still like movies as a medium, just as I like comics as a medium, but . . . well, we're in an era of youth-oriented films, and the young people seem to be so taken with special effects and technology, that they don't seem to be able to recognize a bad plot, a badly-done script, and amateurish acting when they see it. Now we have technologically-brilliant productions, but they don't always entertain as well as the old black-and-white small-screen movies.

DAK: *A lot of the actors who were in the films you liked then are now politicians . . . Shirley Temple, Ronald Reagan. What do you think about that?*

JACK: Well, **Shirley Temple's** not really a politician. It's hard for me to say anything bad against her. She was everybody's favorite little girl. If you want me to say something about **Ronald Reagan**, that's something else. *(Laughter.)* I liked him when he was in those Warner Brothers movies. I hated when **Charles Coburn** cut his leg off in KING'S ROW. Where's **Charles Coburn** when you need him? *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *How about sexual mores, then and now?*

JACK: I don't feel entitled to talk about such things, although I think they have changed since 1950.

DAK: *For the better — or the worse?*

JACK: That's something posterity will decide. I really don't know. I'm inclined to think for the worse. But then I could be an old fogey myself.

"I admire Marvel. They made it

Very quiet and very professional, Joe Rosen slips in and out of the Marvel Bullpen — delivering finished pages on time and picking up new assignments, almost unknown and unnoticed — other than for the quality and dependability of his work.

When I asked Joe if he could find time for an interview, his first reaction was one of calm incredulity. "After 40 years in the industry, it's my first interview. I'm not used to being treated like a celebrity." Somewhat hesitantly, he agreed, still not quite able to accept the attention and long overdue recognition of his careful craftsmanship . . .

DAK: *You come from a lettering family, don't you?*

JOE ROSEN: Well, my brother Sam is a letterer. He worked on THE SPIRIT, for **Will Eisner,** and on Fox's THE BLUE BEETLE, in the 1940s. Sam got me into the business and taught me the trade.

DAK: *How did that happen?*

JOE: My father had a fruit store in Coney Island. In 1940, one of the customers he was well acquainted with mentioned that her son was an artist for Timely — the company that's now Marvel Comics. The son, **George Mandel,** is now a novelist. This was during the Depression. My father asked her if her son could maybe do something for Sam. So **Mandel** introduced Sam to the big letterer of the time, **Howard Ferguson,** who was working for both Timely and Fox. Fox was **Ferguson's** lesser account, and soon he gave it to Sam. Sam got me my first lettering job, at Fox, doing THE BLUE BEETLE.

DAK: *So you were lettering before World War II?*

JOE: Yeah, I started around 1940, 1941. I was lettering when the news came about Pearl Harbor.

DAK: *Did the war interrupt your career?*

JOE: Yeah, I was away in the service for three years, then I came back after the war and went to National — I don't recall if it was called National or Detective Comics back then. I'd done some work for them before the war. I did one comic for them called THE SHINING KNIGHT.

DAK: *This was before letterers got credited, wasn't it?*

JOE: Oh, this was before *anybody* got credited! Except **Bob Kane,** who had BATMAN.

DAK: *And you've been at it steadily ever since. You've probably worked at one time for all the major editors at all the comic-book companies at one time or another.*

JOE: I worked up at National when **Julie Schwartz** was an assistant editor. Let's see . . . I worked with **Mort Weisinger, Jack Schiff.**

DAK: *Do you remember the first time you met Stan Lee?*

JOE: I remember Marvel when it was just **Stan Lee** and **Artie Simek** working in the corner of an office on Madison Avenue. Marvel had kind of folded up a couple of times, and this was after the last fold-up, just before they resurrected themselves and launched out to where they are today.

DAK: *How would you say the industry's changed since then?*

JOE: When I started, I got the impression that everyone was in it as a short-time proposition to make a few bucks 'til they could go into advertising or whatever. Nobody was in it as a career professional. That's why I admire Marvel. By instituting credits, they helped make you feel prouder of your work. And by being so successful they revamped the industry and launched so many titles that they made it possible to have a professional career.

DAK: *There were a lot more publishers back when you started, weren't there?*

JOE: Oh, yeah. Besides Marvel — or Timely — and Detective, there was Fox, and Fawcett, and MLJ — which is now Archie. Harvey was in existence then. I went to Harvey in 1950 and worked there until the 1970s, when I went to Marvel.

DAK: *Is it easier to make a living as a freelance letterer now, with only a few companies, or was it easier back in the 1940s, when there were many?*

JOE: I think it's easier now. In the old days you were on your own, really. You had to run from place to place, getting work. We were young, so whatever we made was great, you know? *(Laughter.)* But now I'm treated as an employee, with benefits and so on. I'm under contract, which would have been undreamed of, thirty years ago. So for me, it's better financially.

DAK: *Even with inflation?*

JOE: It's hard to tell. But I used to get fifty cents a page. So I think it pays better, yeah.

DAK: *How have the stories and artwork changed?*

JOE: Well, the stories, when I was with Fox, were much less sophisticated. The art was more primitive. In those days you had guys pulling all sorts of little tricks — like having something small in the foreground that's easier to draw. *(Laughter.)* It was kind of loose and free and easy going. But they were good artists — the guys were talented. Today, there's more demand for illustrative qualities.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Joe Rosen
Occupation: Letterer
Born: Bronx, NY — 25 December 1920
Residence: Brooklyn, NY
Training: Learned from brother, Sam Rosen.
Credits: Leslie Charteris' THE SAINT comic-strip; THE BLUE BEETLE, SPIDER-MAN, SGT. FURY, DAREDEVIL, CONAN THE BARBARIAN and many other titles too numerous to mention.

possible to have a professional career."

JOE ROSEN

DAK: *You're known for doing the smallest-size lettering in the business. When you worked at Harvey, you must have lettered larger than you do for Marvel.*

JOE: Oh, yeah, yeah. Harvey used the big pages from the old times. The first I ever heard of the change to smaller pages for original art was when my brother Sam was complaining about these new, smaller pages they were instituting up at Marvel. He didn't like it, 'cause he had to letter smaller and it was a strain on his eyes. But I didn't find that they made that much of a difference.

DAK: *When did you start lettering so small?*

JOE: It was when Sam was working for Marvel. He had too much work and I didn't have enough, so I did a story for him. It was a SGT FURY. And I thought: There's only one way I'm going to get all this copy in — by making it as small as it was possible to letter it and still make it clear. I actually was not too sure it would be all right. I'm still not sure. But I've never had any complaints about it.

DAK: *No, and in fact — I'm not sure if you're aware of this — you are actually much-sought-after by writers, especially when there's a lot of copy in a script. I know a couple of times when I had fairly heavy scripts, I'd literally beg John Verpooten, who was then head of Marvel's production department, "Please, can't you get Joe Rosen? Then I know the copy will fit!" I guess you end up doing a lot more lettering per page than some of the other letterers . . .*

JOE: No, it all balances out. You can't have a lot of words in the story all the time. Sure, sometimes you have to establish the foundation of the story, so there's a lot of copy for a couple pages, but then you have to have some action. That's usually lighter copy, so it works out. Of course, some scripts are heavy page after page after page. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Do you have specific assignments each month?*

JOE: There are certain books I tend to get regularly — SPIDER-MAN, CONAN, DAREDEVIL, things like that. And I get some new stuff occasionally.

DAK: *How many pages do you letter a month?*

JOE: Well, my quota is about forty a week.

DAK: *Whew! Do you work five days a week?*

JOE: No, I work the whole week.

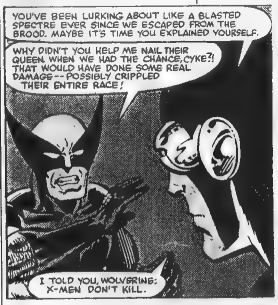
People I know who went into regular jobs don't quite understand it. They see me around the house all the time and it's hard for them to understand that I'm working, too.

DAK: *What does a letterer contribute to a comic?*

JOE: Well, take the strip TERRY AND THE PIRATES, which was very popular. It had nice, open, airy lettering — done with flair. It wasn't too obvious, but it had a nice, crisp look that made you want to read it. Of course, it helped that the strip was well-written and the stories were good. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Joe, you've certainly seen a lot of comic-book history.*

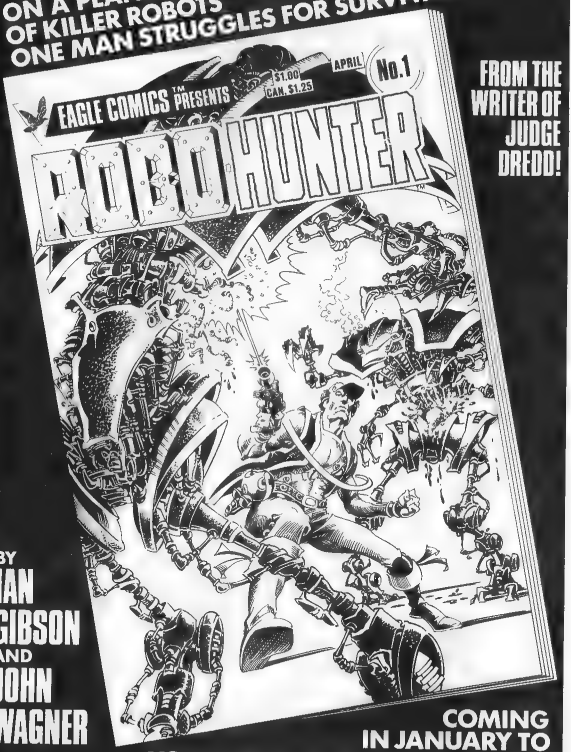
JOE: What can I say? All I did was letter one page, and then I lettered another page, and then another and another.


YOU'VE BEEN LURKING ABOUT LIKE A BLASTED SPECTRE EVER SINCE WE ESCAPED FROM THE BROOD. MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU EXPLAINED YOURSELF.
WHY DIDN'T YOU HELP ME NAIL THEIR QUEEN WHEN WE HAD THE CHANCE, CYKE?! THAT WOULD HAVE DONE SOME REAL DAMAGE -- POSSIBLY CRIPPLED THEIR ENTIRE RACE!
I TOLD YOU, WOLVERINE: X-MEN DON'T KILL.

An example of Joe Rosen's lettering. From X-MEN #194.

©1982 Marvel Comics

ON A PLANET
OF KILLER ROBOTS
ONE MAN STRUGGLES FOR SURVIVAL...



FROM THE
WRITER OF
JUDGE
DREDD!

BY
IAN
GIBSON
AND
JOHN
WAGNER

COMING
IN JANUARY TO
YOUR LOCAL COMIC BOOK STORE

32 PAGES · FOUR COLOR · MONTHLY · $1 · MANDO PAPER

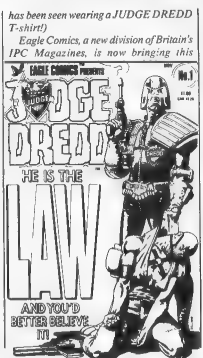
"The first JUDGE DREDD has been successful."

NICK LANDAU & MIKE LAKE

Nuclear war has blasted most of America into a radioactive wasteland called "The Cursed Earth." Millions of survivors have been herded into giant, overpopulated cities. Crime rapidly engulfs these "mega-cities," and only desperate measures can keep the remnants of civilization from perishing in a plague of murder, theft and arson. And so the "Judges" are called in — genetically-produced super-cops who exercise the powers of policeman, judge, jury, and sometimes, executioner . . .

This is the bizarre and violent world of JUDGE DREDD, probably the most popular comic to come out of the United Kingdom. Dredd is the toughest and most honest of the Judges, and lately he has become the object of quite a large cult in England. His comic has repeatedly won the British Eagle Award; he is a hero to certain "New Wave" rock groups; and his grim, Gibraltar-jawed face has launched seemingly a thousand merchandising campaigns: there are Judge Dredd games, posters, and badges. (Even Koo Stark, Prince Andrew's girlfriend, has been seen wearing a JUDGE DREDD T-shirt!)

Eagle Comics, a new division of Britain's IPC Magazines, is now bringing this Dredd phenomenon to the USA, with a monthly JUDGE DREDD color comic. To alert Americans to the inside story of this new "British invasion," English fans Frank Plowright and Steve Whitaker spoke to the men who are spearheading it — Nick Landau, Eagle Comics Editor and Publisher/Editor of Titan Books; and Mike Lake, Director of Titan Distributors. Nick and Mike not only talked about the Judge, but gave us a fascinating look at comic-book publishing in general, and the British comic scene in particular . . .



STEVE WHITAKER: *You've called the company "Eagle Comics" — have you had any problem with IPC about using the name "Eagle"?*

MIKE LAKE: We originally thought of the name "Empire Comics," but there turns out to be an American company trading under that name. So our next choice was "Eagle Comics," which is a much better name anyway. We had the name checked out by American attorneys, and though there are pages of companies using the word "Eagle" and there was

© 1983 Eagle Comics

"In Brian Bolland and Mike McMahon we had

even an "Eagle Comics" in 1942, it's long defunct. It was legally clear to use.

Eagle is the most illustrious name in British comics. It was the first boy's science-fiction comic in England in the 1950s, and featured DAN DARE and some of the best artwork — the best color work — ever seen in British comics.

FRANK PLOWRIGHT: *John Byrne grew up on it, didn't he?*

MIKE: He used some Eagle artwork as a reference in the recent FANTASTIC FOUR featuring Roman soldiers. Eagle died in about 1967 and was recently revived in a much-changed format — photo/fumetti.

The other thing that Americans will associate with "Eagle" is the Eagle Awards. The X-MEN won every year, and many issues of X-MEN have the Eagle symbol on the cover. It's such a beautiful symbol.

NICK LANDAU: British artist **Trev Goring** designed it. Incidentally, the Eagle Awards are now back. They're jointly organized by **Richard Burton,** who co-created them and works as an editor for the comic 2000 AD, and Titan Distributors.

STEVE: *What exactly is the relationship between Eagle Comics and Titan?*

NICK: Eagle Comics is an IPC imprint, which is packaged for IPC by Titan Books and Titan Distributors.

STEVE: *How did JUDGE DREDD evolve?*

NICK: In early 1978, the first issue of 2000 AD, a new British science-fiction weekly publication by IPC, hit the stands. It was edited by **Pat Mills** and **Kelvin Gosnell,** and was an immediate success. It *sold out* its initial printing of between 350,000 and 400,000 copies — and remember, this was a *weekly.* In issue 2, a character called "Judge Dredd" was introduced. He was the toughest of the "Judges," policemen of the future given wide latitude to uphold the law in the face of a soaring crime-wave. His "beat" was Mega-City One, one of the overpopulated American cities into which survivors of a nuclear war had been crowded in the late Twenty-First Century.

The stories, at the time, were based on simple ideas. For example, there was an "antique" car heist — with the "antique" car being a 1970s model. Elements of this future society were introduced one step at a time. JUDGE DREDD was one of 6 or 7 stories in 2000 AD.

FRANK: *What were some of the other stories?*

NICK: Well, there was MACH 1, a SIX-MILLION-DOLLAR MAN type of story; and INVASION, which dealt with the "Volg" — that is Russian — invasion of England, in 1990 —

MIKE: Beautifully drawn, in the early episodes, by **Jesus Blasco.**

NICK: — and Dan Dare from the old Eagle Comic was re-introduced as a semi-punk spacer. It wasn't until the "Robot Rebellion" story, which began in issue #9, that JUDGE DREDD hit his stride and got the Number One spot in 2000 AD.

STEVE: *Most of the stories were set in America, weren't they?*

MIKE: Yes, Mega-City One covers the whole of the North American Eastern Seaboard.

Two sketches for cover of Eagle's JUDGE DREDD #7. On right: the final version.

© 1983 IPC Magazines, Ltd.

two of the best artists working in comics anywhere."

Brian Bolland's rendition of a battered-but-unbowed Judge Dredd. From Titan's THE CURSED EARTH, Part One.

©1982 Titan Books, Ltd.

NICK: The premise was that all the incredible and ridiculous things that happened in 2000 AD could only happen in America.

For about the last five years, JUDGE DREDD has been the most popular strip in 2000 AD.

STEVE: *And how popular is 2000 AD itself?*

NICK: Well, to put the whole Judge Dredd phenomenon in perspective, 2000 AD is one of about 10 comic published by IPC, and it's about half-way down the sales list.

FRANK: *But it's one of the few British comics that appeals to comics fandom.*

NICK: One of the few that appeals to the American type of comic-book fandom. The idea behind 2000 AD was that it should be an amalgam of British *and* American comics — the story-pacing of British comics combined with the more visual approach of American comics.

FRANK: *So it makes sense to sell JUDGE DREDD to the States.*

MIKE: From the start of Titan Distributors, back in '78-'79, we tried to push British comics in the States, which really meant trying to sell 2000 AD to the Americans. Starting with about issue #30 we used to send something like 500-1,000 copies, but the Americans weren't that interested, because what they were getting was a weekly comic, totally different from anything they were used to. At one stage in an effort to boost American sales I used to put four comics into a plastic bag and try to sell them as a monthly 2000 AD bagged set.

NICK: He would sit in the corner of the warehouse bagging these comics in hope the Americans would think it was a monthly comic without a cover. *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: Copies did eventually reach New York, and professionals in New York began to pick up on JUDGE DREDD. We decided to stop flogging a dead horse, and stopped sending copies to America around issue #110. But there was still interest. I used to hear from American dealers, "What is there on Judge Dredd that you can send us?" — and there was nothing but the weekly format. Nobody wanted to buy a weekly comic because American retailers didn't want to stock this totally alien format.

NICK: The main objections from dealers to 2000 AD at the time was that it was black-and-white, came out weekly, and looked like the inside of a comic without a cover.

MIKE: And JUDGE DREDD only ran 4 or 5 pages in 2000 AD. We knew that in JUDGE DREDD we had some of the best comic stories ever. In **Brian Bolland** and **Mike McMahon** we had two of the best artists working in comics anywhere. There had to be *some* way of showing them to the Americans.

NICK: There was interest shown in JUDGE DREDD and a few of the other characters from some of the European countries. JUDGE DREDD had been syndicated in France in a series of pocket-books, but had never gotten much exposure. After the first Titan Books JUDGE DREDD collection — called, simply, JUDGE DREDD — featuring Brian's artwork, METAL HURLANT showed interest, and they started negotiations with IPC's syndication branch for the reproduction rights. As a result of this, and a Dutch publisher's efforts, a series of color collections was produced. There were four different editions. We did the English edition, which was entitled THE STREETS OF MEGA-CITY, while METAL HURLANT did the French edition, and there were also Dutch and German editions.

MIKE: We had been able to sell a small number of DREDD collections to America

HE'S WAITING IN THE SHADOWS
WE CAN DO THIS EASY OR HARD, BUT THE LAST'S GOING HOME! WHICH WAY YOU WANT IT?
OH, NO, NO
GRIM JACK
ONLY IN STARSLAYER!
Count On It!
FIRST COMICS
COUNT ON US.

"It has an American visual approach."

because finally there was a format that they could reasonably accept and sell in their shops. Our first contact with IPC didn't allow us to sell very many so it remained a bit of a cult following — nobody could get enough of it or find out fully what it was all about.

FRANK: *So since then interest had built to the point where you felt a four-color monthly JUDGE DREDD comic was viable.*

MIKE: In 1981, we went to the editorial director of IPC, **John Sanders**, to tell him we thought the idea of a JUDGE DREDD comic really was a goer. At that point Pacific had just started publishing American comics so I think they were the first competitor to Marvel and DC, so we could see that it *could* be done, and with a certain amount of insight into the American market we realized it could be done with reasonable ease. Pacific deserves credit as the first to realize that the network of independent shops and comic-book distributors in America was enough to sustain an independent publisher who sold on a firm-sale basis to comic shops only. That was crucial to the success of our monthly JUDGE DREDD comic.

FRANK: *You've printed one JUDGE DREDD book now — how's it been doing?*

NICK: We've just come back from the Chicago Convention, which was very interesting in that it had turned into a trade show where there were not only artists, writers, editors and fans but also publishers, printers from both Sparta and Ronalds, who print the Baxter books, and even film separators and agents — so it's almost like a book fair — and JUDGE DREDD was very well received there. A couple of dealers sold out their stock within the first half-day of receiving their first issues.

MIKE: I had to go round restocking them from a box we'd brought from the printing press.

FRANK: *They're being printed in Sparta?*

MIKE: Yes, and they're distributed through the direct sales outlets, just like Pacific, First and Eclipse.

STEVE: *Would it have been impossible to print in England?*

MIKE: The shipping costs would have been too high. A year ago we went to the USA and checked out the prices of color separations and printing, and discovered that printing and distributing in America was a viable proposition for us, even though we were on the other side of the Atlantic.

One interesting point is when we went to the sales executive for the printing plant, a guy called **Jim Broderick**, who's been working for World Color for years, actually showed us a photo of him color-separating ACTION COMICS #1 back in 1938.

FRANK: *Are there any problems about producing from England? I presume you can't fly over to America every couple of weeks.*

MIKE: The only delays are in actually getting together packages and getting them sent over swifty and safely — and getting packages *back* swiftly and safely.

NICK: I should point out that Mike and I handle different sides of the operation. Mike is based at Titan Distributors and is responsible for the incoming orders and making sure the dealers pay, while my responsibility over at Titan Books is to supervise the production of the pages up until they reach the printer, and to make sure that the advertising and promotion is handled properly.

FRANK: *Then the production work you have to do on the comic isn't done at IPC? You handle it yourself?*

NICK: Certain elements are handled at IPC. But the work starts at Titan Books. First I paginate each issue, which means preparing a contents list of what is to go into the book that month. Then I send over a page requisition to IPC, who can use this to make a request for the artwork from the IPC vaults where all the 2000 AD artwork is held. Once the pages are up in the office at IPC, I prepare a page guide which marks out any major alterations which have to be made, such as title pages, centerspread pages, and pages where in the weekly you would find that there was a cliffhanger and the next week the cliffhanger would be repeated, so that these two cliffhanger pages have to be melded. Then I have to write the introduction, and a very talented guy named **John Burns, Jr.**, the nephew

From ROBOHUNTER, Eagle's new title.

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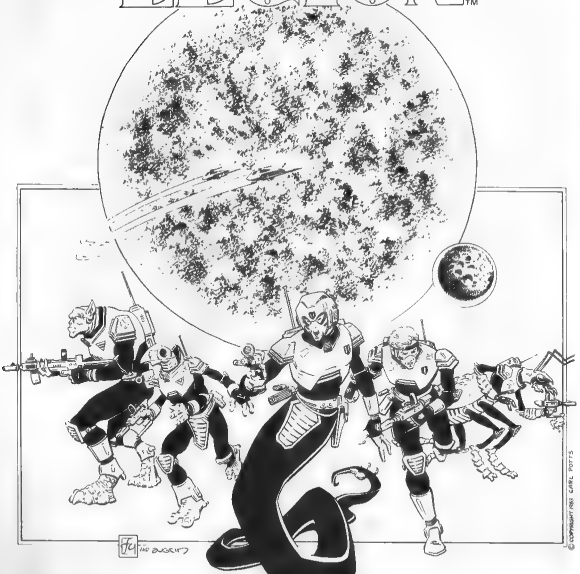
IN YOUR FUTURE...

THE ALIEN LEGION™



SCRIPT: ALAN ZELENETZ PENCILS: FRANK CIROCCO INKS: TERRY AUSTIN EDITOR: CARL POTTS

MARVEL MAKES THE MAGIC!

"American professionals rate JUDGE DREDD highly."

of the British comic-strip artist **John Burns**, resizes the artwork and does the coloring.

Incidentally, we've found that it's much better to add space than attempt to add art. Adding artwork only distorts the original style. Once we've added space we can add color. One of the problems is that the original artwork was drawn for black and white, and there is a lot of black. We could not possibly use that amount of black on a color page because black is not a color that prints well. Large areas of black tend to turn grey over the Sparta presses. Second, it's very difficult to contrast black with anything other than a light color, so it's difficult to get any mood or effect into the coloring.

After **John Burns, Jr.** has colored the artwork, both it and the resizing go off to our separators so that the film can be made. The film is then returned to us, we check it, and then it's sent off to the printers, so the plates can be made. Then it finally goes on the presses, and hey presto, we've got a comic-book. Now, over to Mike . . .

MIKE: While the preparation of the comic's going on, Nick has also been writing and supervising the production of the Eagle News publicity sheets, and advertisements to appear in the American fanzines, and I've been contacting the dealers, telling them what's going to appear, and eventually getting back sales-orders. The actual distribution — the physical movement of the printed comic — is made very easy by the printing plant, which nowadays has a very sophisticated system by which orders go straight from the printers to the distributors without us ever having to touch them. All I have to do is invoice it, and I can do that easily from England because I've already told the printing plant what to dispatch. I've been very encouraged by the support from the dealers, both the distributors and the shops themselves. We've got better sales than we expected.

FRANK: *Brian Bolland's artwork being printed in CAMELOT 3000 must help. People are looking forward to more of it in JUDGE DREDD.*

NICK: Well, several things have helped. Firstly, the limited number of Titan Books that we've distributed in America have created an undercurrent of interest, so that although everybody has heard of JUDGE DREDD, they don't necessarily know who or what he is, because they haven't been able to get the books. Secondly, Brian's work on CAMELOT 3000 has given him a substantial following.

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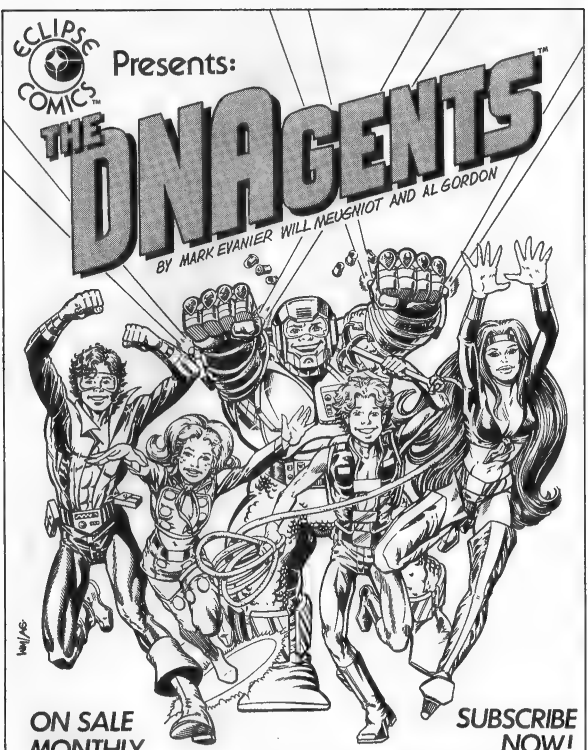
From NEMESIS THE WARLOCK, due from Eagle in Spring 1984.

And thirdly, the American comic-book professionals really rate JUDGE DREDD highly. They tend to prefer the work of **Mike McMahon**, interestingly enough

FRANK: *Yes, when Frank Miller came over for our Comicana convention last year, he was given a menu of English artists, writers and publishers he could meet and who were dying to meet him — and the one person he chose was Mike McMahon.*

MIKE: Mike McMahon is an artist's artist. Not only that, but he's someone who's not keen on publicity. He's the



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"Mike McMahon is an artist's artist."

Mike McMahon art from JUDGE DREDD.

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most low-key personality on this side of the Atlantic.

FRANK: *Although Americans primarily associate Brian Bolland with JUDGE DREDD, Mike McMahon has produced much more artwork for the series.*

NICK: The three major JUDGE DREDD artists are: **Carlos Sanchez Ezquerra,** who visually created the character and a number of the early stories; **Ron Smith,** who is currently drawing the JUDGE DREDD newspaper strip which appears in the DAILY STAR and is syndicated in the Sydney TRIBUNE; and **Mike McMahon.** In fact in terms of output, **Brian Bolland** ranks about fourth, or possibly even fifth, after **Ian Gibson,** who is better known for his work on ROBO-HUNTER. However, almost all the JUDGE DREDD stories over the six-and-a-bit years of the series have been written by **John Wagner** — an outstanding writer who does not get anything near the credit he deserves because of comic fandom's predilection for glorifying comic-book artists. The only ones he didn't write were some of the earlier uncredited stories, which predated the introduction of the 2000 AD "Credit Cards" — the box with the creator credits. **Pat Mills** wrote almost all the CURSED EARTH saga, which we'll be reprinting beginning with JUDGE DREDD #5.

FRANK: *Are you following the chronology of the JUDGE DREDD story as it appeared in 2000 AD?*

NICK: For the most part, yes, but not for the early stories. The reason is that in the early days, there wasn't much of a continuity. More of a series of self-contained little stories that were tied together because they featured the same supporting characters. Neither was there any real growth of characterization. THE CURSED EARTH is when Judge Dredd really falls into a chronology.

FRANK: *Will you be producing other EAGLE COMICS?*

NICK: Well, the first JUDGE DREDD has been successful, so in December, we'll be introducing a new title, ROBO-HUNTER, which is a character written by **John Wagner** and drawn by **Ian Gibson.** The back-up strip in ROBO-HUNTER will be THE HARLEM HEROES, which appeared in the very first issue of 2000 AD. It was illustrated by **Dave Gibbons** and written by **Tom Tully.** HARLEM HEROES is basically a futuristic sports story with the game taking place a hundred or so feet in the air — a kind of American football with jetpacks.

FRANK: *Will there be any original material?*

NICK: We have a terrific amount of very good material we can use from 2000 AD. JUDGE DREDD has run for six years and almost all of the stories will be new to the American market, so we don't see any need for original material yet.

STEVE: *Might you be going beyond IPC's 2000 AD material to her erstwhile sister comic, STARLORD, or even to IPC's previous stuff from the 1960s?*

NICK: As long as JUDGE DREDD and the other 2000 AD characters are successful, I hope we can reprint earlier classics, such as THE SPIDER and THE STEEL CLAW, illustrated by **Jesus Blasco.** THE SPIDER was at one stage scripted by **Jerry Siegel,** the co-creator of SUPERMAN.

MIKE: As a historical footnote, one of the very few credits that ever appeared in any British comic prior to 2000 AD was the credit to **Jerry Siegel,** in an issue of LION around the mid-Sixties, for the SPIDER origin story, beautifully drawn by **Reg Bunn.** Spider was an extremely weird criminal mastermind with long pointed ears, and a Spider-Gun, and a variety of JAMES BOND type things — a bizarre kind of SPIDER-MAN combined with the old pulp Spider. It featured a variety of very eccentric English villains that could have been invented only by a deranged English mind.

NICK: I'd like to point out, for the record, that **Jerry Siegel** didn't create THE SPIDER, although I can't recall exactly who did. He did script a number of other strips for IPC, such as GADGET-MAN AND GIMMICK-KID, which ran for several months in a British weekly, and SPOOKMAN AND SPOOKBOY, which Jerry said he didn't think was ever published.

STEVE: *Are there any other old strips likely to be reprinted?*

NICK: It's really too early to predict what we'll be publishing in the next 3 or 4 years because we've only got a few issues of JUDGE DREDD out. We do have the next couple of years mapped out, and we do know we're hoping to follow ROBO-HUNTER with a number of mini-series.

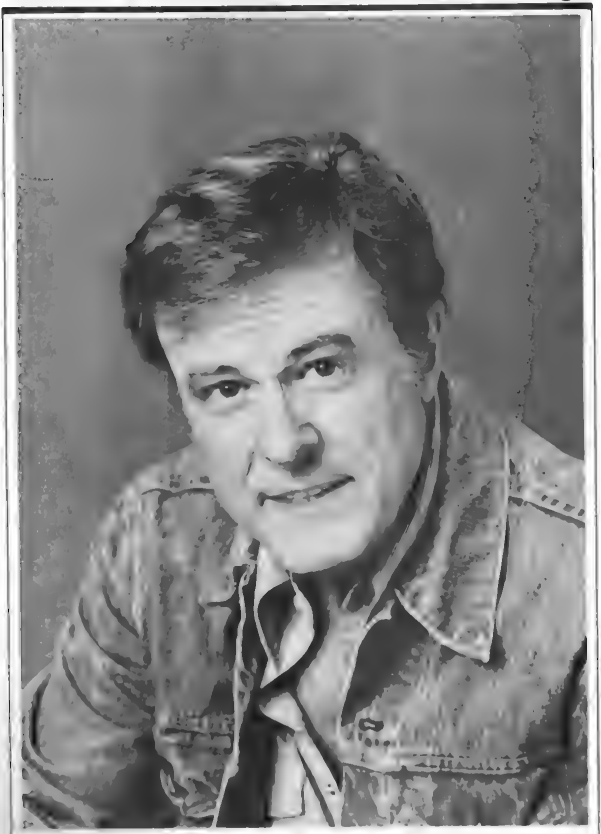
STEVE: *How about STRONTIUM DOG?*

NICK: That is one of the strips we hope to do as a mini-series. In fact, we'll try to outdo everybody — we'll have not only mini- and maxi-series, but micro- and macro-series!

MIKE: Micro-series — a 16 page comic. *(Laughter.)*

NICK: And a new-length — the midi-series! It's just like an ordinary comic but it's knee-length. *(Laughter.)*

"I was a dedicated cartoonist at age



nine. I earned my first dough that way."

ROBERT CULP

Cartoonist-turned-actor Robert Culp recently co-starred in the superhero television series, THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO. Culp played gung-ho secret-agent Maxwell, the laid-back, super-powered protagonist's partner and foil. Agent Maxwell evoked memories of Culp's most famous role, counterspy Kelly Robinson of I SPY.

Culp's interest in comics dates back to his childhood. More recently, he has expressed interest in doing a film version of Don McGregor's "Ragamuffins," which appears in the comic ECLIPSE. (Don has been a long-term admirer of Culp's teleplay writing, and in fact quotes a couple of Culp-written scripts in his book DRAGONFLAME.) Unfortunately, Culp cannot discuss the project at this time, but was quite open to talking candidly about his career, opinions, and continuing interest in popular culture . . .

DAN HAGEN: *I understand you wanted to be a cartoonist at one time.*

ROBERT CULP: Yes, in fact I earned my first dough that way. I was a dedicated cartoonist at age nine and up, through high school, when I started doing single-plate advertisements for the newspapers, line drawings and stuff like that

DAN: *Were there any artists whose work influenced or particularly impressed you?*

ROBERT: I was attracted to the best. I had a big interest in Big Little Books, and of course the best two draftsmen who were doing anything that appeared in Big Little Books were **Hal Foster** and **Alex Raymond.**

My daughter just walked in with her diaper on.

THE DAUGHTER: Daddy!

ROBERT: Then the guy to go off the wall from — absolutely forget it — who probably was, despite **Alex Raymond's** genius, the dean of them all in terms of imagination was **George Herriman** who did KRAZY KAT.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Robert Culp
Occupation: Actor, writer, director
Born: 16 August 1930
Theatrical Credits: HE WHO GETS SLAPPED (Best Actor Of The Year In An Off-Broadway Production), THE PRESCOTT PROPOSALS, A CLEARING IN THE WOODS
Motion Picture Credits: PT 109, THE RAIDERS, SUNDAY IN NEW YORK, SAMMY, THE WAY OUT SEAL, RHINO, THE HANGED MAN, THE GROVE, HANNIE CAULDER, BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE, SKY RIDERS, GREAT SCOUT AND CATHOUSE THURSDAY, and HICKEY AND BOGGS
Television Credits: TRACK-DOWN, I SPY, THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO
Favorite Preformance With Bill Cosby: HICKEY AND BOGGS

Prior to **Herriman** and any of these people, the guy who was the best draftsman of the bunch was **Winsor McCay,** whose creation was LITTLE NEMO.

DAN: *You're still collecting Big Little Books, aren't you?*

ROBERT: Yes. When I was a little kid, they used to be in every dime store. There would be a new one every week or two weeks, and there might be three or four or five copies of that one. I'm talking when I was six and seven and eight years old.

I guess by the time I was ready to go away to college, I had about 200 or something of these — one of a kind or mostly one of kind. There wasn't much trading that went on. Mostly, that was with comic books, but not with Big Little Books. And of course at that time, they were a dime apiece, just like comic books.

When I went away to college, I called all the kids in the neighborhood in and I gave them all away to the kids. And as I was doing it, I could see clearly that these books that had meant so very much to me meant absolutely nothing to these kids at all. And I knew they would be torn to pieces and written on with crayons and all that shit within a week.

I regretted the decision even more later, after having finished college and gone on to New York and so forth, when I realized that once in a blue moon you'd see one of these things, pretty much dog-eared, in a used book store or something. And I said, "Jesus, I'd sure like to put a full collection together someday if I ever get rich."

Well, those were like 50 and 20 cents in the '50s. And then all of a sudden when

"The guy who was the best draftsman of the

BATMAN hit, everything changed overnight, literally. And that which was 10 cents new, was $12.50 and $15.00 used.

DAN: *Had you started collecting before then?*

ROBERT: No. Only when I started I SPY. I had an office that had one room where I kept my desk. And I said, "Jesus, I want to fill all the walls with Big Little Books."

DAN: *A lot of people in comics collecting, too, have that experience of kicking yourself later for giving away lots of things that turned out to be money.*

ROBERT: I just came back from Aspen, Colorado, about a month ago, and in a sort of a gift shop there was a glass case with Big Little Books in the back and I wasn't sure whether I had them or not. So I asked for the key and I opened the case to look inside, figuring, "This is Aspen, Colorado, man. These guys don't know yet."

They were in pretty good condition. MICKEY MOUSE Big Little Books for 85 bucks! In very good condition, but not mint. Eighty-five dollars. So I gave him back the key.

DAN: *How many do you have, do you figure?*

ROBERT: I don't know how many I have, but it's pushing a thousand. And that's a double collection. The last time a single collection was sold that I knew about — that's about 12 years ago now — it was sold at the University of Michigan for $5,000. I would say that the University's collection is probably worth five or six times that now.

DAN: *Do you ever have to put up with funny looks from people because you're an adult Big Little Book collector?*

ROBERT: Not when you mention the price.

DAN: *What about other hobbies, besides Big Little Books?*

ROBERT: I play tennis when I can, but 90 percent of my time now is behind the typewriter. I'm writing my first novel at the moment. I've placed it in New York and I'm very happy with the way it's going. I'm getting up in the morning at dawn and working until about one o'clock.

DAN: *Is it going to be about the entertainment field, or is it something else?*

ROBERT: Nope, It's something else. Well, it's a detective story for the '80s.

DAN: *THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO — did that give you any pause, when you were offered the role in that series? I mean just in the sense of doing a comic-book show?*

ROBERT: Well, you see, I always had this ridiculous idea that we were going to grow out of that, but we never did.

DAN: *You thought one day Ralph would give up the suit, that sort of thing?*

ROBERT: No, no, no. It's the quality of the stories and the quality of the writing and the quality of the experiences and interrelationships between the human beings that, I thought, was going to grow. And the network stopped us cold and didn't permit it.

They wanted it to stay exactly the way it was, which was for kids and for, like, hip young adults who perceived that it was simple-minded and charming and that the relationship between Maxwell and Ralph was unique.

DAN: *You did sort of sneak in more serious themes than the audience would expect there. I remember particularly liking the middle-age episode, the one in which you had a sort of mid-life crisis. Did you do much writing for the series?*

ROBERT: Yeah, I wrote a lot of stuff standing up and rewrote a lot of stuff coming down that wasn't so hot.

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bunch was LITTLE NEMO's Winsor McCay."

We're talking at the moment about doing a feature motion picture of THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO, which to me would be an awful lot of fun. I have a great story that I want to try to utilize. I'm meeting with the boss next week, **Steve Cannell**, to see whether we can get it together.

DAN: *Would you retell the original story, or would you just go from where you left off?*

ROBERT: We'd just go. Probably we'd recap it for people who've never heard of it, but there aren't very many of those.

You see, we were really on our way. If the network had left us alone for another 30 days, we would still be on the air. But they got trigger-happy and they cut us off just ahead of when we would have owned the time slot.

DAN: *Wasn't there a suit from the SUPERMAN people, from Warner Communications?*

ROBERT: Yes. It was a heavyweight suit and it lasted a year and a half.

DAN: *It came out in your favor, though.*

ROBERT: Yes, we won the suit.

DAN: *What did you personally feel about that? Did you have any feeling that it was a rip-off of Superman?*

ROBERT: No, because there have been too many.

DAN: *All those superheroes . . .*

ROBERT: Many too many, and there's always room for one more.

DAN: *With ROCKFORD FILES and THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO, Steve Cannell seems good at putting a twist on a genre and making it kind of fresh.*

ROBERT: What Steve is good at is taking a light-hearted approach to a genre, if you will, and kind of, as you say, putting a twist on it that no one else would think of but **Steve Cannell.**

DAN: *Making it sort of seem to fit reality a little better than genres do ordinarily.*

ROBERT: Nowadays, yes. The suspension of disbelief is the first law of the theater taught to every dramatist when he's starting out. If he doesn't learn it, he's sunk.

The audience walks up to the box office and plunks down its five bucks — or $45 or $50 if it's Broadway — and walks into the theater and sits down in a seat. The analogy is apt for the living room, as well, because you are buying commercials that you don't really want.

The first thing that has to happen for that audience is that it must be permitted to suspend disbelief. Because they know

they're in a theater seat or they know they're sitting in front of a colored block in their living room. That's disbelief, because we're gonna tell 'em a story up there that they automatically will say is just a story on a box or just a bunch of actors on a stage.

So the suspension of disbelief is the phrase that's been come up with in the last 300 years, and it's everything. To do that nowadays, with the degree of audience sophistication having squared itself several times since I was a kid, is very, very difficult. And one of the ways you do it is through, like, double negatives.

The double negative, when you're talking in terms of language, yields a positive. The same thing sometimes occurs in physics and in chemistry. And it certainly yields wonderful results in the theater. Something that **Steve Cannell** understands instinctively. I studied it. I don't think he ever did.

DAN: *How would you apply it to what he does? Can you give me an example of a double negative in GREATEST AMERICAN HERO?*

ROBERT: Well, here we have the ridiculous situation of being given this suit by extraterrestrials and sticking these two absolutely disparate human beings together and, somewhere in that, the extraterrestrials knew that the chemistry between these two particular human beings was flawless for what they wanted.

One of them hates the suit — that's the negative — but cannot resist when he's called upon and made to feel guilty where his patriotism is concerned by a guy who distrusts and dislikes almost everything in the world except the kid and the suit. That's the double negative. You put 'em together and you get a synergism. Instead of two plus two equals four, it equals five.

DAN: *A lot of little innovations, too. For example, violating the genre by calling him Ralph instead of giving him a superhero name.*

ROBERT: That's another example of the concept of coming at it sideways, or in a negative sort of a way.

DAN: *Right. What it would be like if somebody was actually given a suit like that.*

ROBERT: Well, imagine this. The very hook that made the series sell, and made it work for the first year but became a detriment in the second year, was that he couldn't work the suit. That's a negative. He kept bashing into walls . . .

DAN: *Right. You couldn't do that forever, though.*

ROBERT: You can't do that forever because the audience got down on it! I mean, you have no idea of the mail and the talk on the streets. "When is somebody gonna teach that asshole to fly that suit?" We all knew that it was going to come to a swift end, and it did.

And pretty soon, what we did in the second year was start to accelerate his ability to find uses for the suit and to make it work. And by the time we got to the third year, we didn't expect too many crashes and too many screamings and falling out of the sky. Only a few.

DAN: *How would you compare it to the other superhero series on the air? I would say more sophisticated than all of them. Although THE INCREDIBLE HULK was okay, I thought.*

ROBERT: THE HULK was again another example of the negativeness that I'm talking about, which is silly, but yields the kind of comedy that we were doing that nobody else on television was doing — outside of maybe SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE.

DAN: *Except that yours had a twist of humanism. SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE always seemed pretty harsh and negative to me.*

ROBERT: Harsh and negative, yes. Both of those things. But we didn't want to be that, because the essential thing that made the show work was, underneath it all, a kind of sweetness — a core of sweetness in Ralph that his fiance, and later his wife, could identify. And there was also a core of that in Maxwell that Maxwell would deny 'till his dying breath

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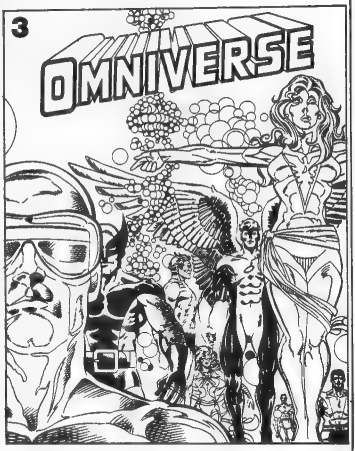

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LAST WORD

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MOST INTERESTING & ABSORBING OF ALL — EXCELSIOR!

Dear David:

Except for the ubiquitous ever-to-be-expected typos, I thought that my interviews in your issue #5 turned out pretty good. I hope you share that sentiment.

In truth, I think that COMICS INTERVIEW is probably the most interesting and absorbing fanzine of all. Not just because issue #5 featured one of my favorite creative persons (after all, at some time or other, I've appeared in most fanzines), but rather because reading about people is probably still everybody's favorite pastime — as Time, Inc. found out years ago.

Anyway, congratulations on your publication. It just seems to get better with each issue.

Now, after all those adorable words of praise, do you think you could spare another half dozen of #5? I wanna send them to all my detractors. Come to think of it, I may need a few million!

Excelsior!

Stan Lee
Marvel Productions, Ltd.
4610 Van Nuys Blvd.
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STAN LEE OUTSTANDING!

Dear DAK,

Just read COMICS INTERVIEW #5. Outstanding! Stan Lee Goes Hollywood was truly a fine piece. With the creators of ELFQUEST, to boot! What a super-interesting issue you put together. I read the magazine cover-to-cover and wanted more. Both interviews were long enough — but not too long to lose interest. Definitely power-packed material. I only *wish* I read that there would be another DR. STRANGE show on TV. I thought that was done well enough to knock any five prime time shows off the air (including ROOTS — it bored me).

Best wishes from Empire Comics!

Jim Furfferi
Empire Comics
1176 Mt. Hope Ave.
Rochester, NY 14620

STANDS IN AWE

Dear DAK:

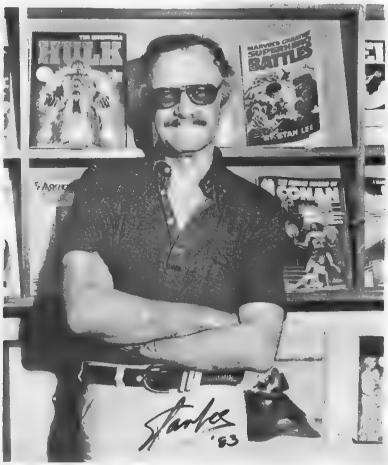
The fifth issue of COMICS INTERVIEW just came my way and I wanted to write and tell you that I enjoyed it. I even stand a little in awe of you guys.

In my years in the fan press, I've done a few interviews myself — and I've never felt comfortable doing them. I'm a writer, not a talker, and facing down some interview subject, keeping track of my notes, listening to the interviewee's remarks for comment hooks, and trying to stay coherent myself are not activities that fit my definition of a good time. Then comes transcribing, editing, and typing, none of which I like very much either. The point is, I guess, I *know* how much work goes into these things, and I'm impressed by how easy you make it all look!

But, sometimes delightful interview subjects help make it all worthwhile. I particularly enjoyed **Frell's** interview with the **Pinis.** I've interviewed them twice now, once for THE COMICS JOURNAL and again for THE ELFQUEST GATHERUM, and I've always appreciated the extra lengths Wendy and Richard go to in order to help the interviewer feel more at ease and welcome. Then, too, the chemistry between the two as they respond to questions, roll with the punches, and come back for more is a lot of fun to watch and experience. **Frell's** interview brought back quite a few pleasant memories for me as I read it, and I could just about hear Wendy's and Richard's own voices in my head.

I'm just a little boggled by Wendy's phrasing on page 21: **Christy Marx** "is another woman who has participated in comics as a writer." I realize that in

STAN LEE



DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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casual conversation, speaking aloud without a chance to go back and rewrite uneconomical or less-than-felicitous choices of words and phrases, it's easy to say things oddly. Even so . . . *participate* in comics?! Makes it sound like a game, with rules and standards of fairness. I'm sure the **Pinis** know better than anyone that comics are more **Darwin** than **Marquis of Queensberry.** Wendy found her niche in comics by fighting for it and carving it out herself while Richard masterminded sales, promotion, and fending off boarding parties. It may be participating in comics . . . but it's like saying a soldier participated in World War II.

Anyway, like I said, I'm impressed by COMICS INTERVIEW, particularly when you land some seldom-seen-personality like **Richard Goldwater** in front of the microphone. I hope you can get more such, particularly some of the West Coast writers and artists. One of my stronger regrets is that **Russ Manning** passed on before someone like you could land him for a really substantive interview. I'm sure he had a lot of fascinating stories and valuable insights and information picked up over a long and admirable career. How many others are there like him?

Dwight R. Decker
P.O. Box 2217
Northlake, IL 60164

Thanks for your artulate and insightful observations, Dwight. Your letter made our day. And, even though you may find interviewing hard work, you do a good job of it — so if you ever feel the urge, we'd be delighted to number you among our intrepid occasional interviewers-at-large!

—DAK

NO "WORRY GLANDS" IN SPAIN

Dear DAK:

Thank you for the issues of COMICS INTERVIEW. I love your mag. The design work is great. The written material is of interest, even to me. Keep up the good work.

You probably heard that **Al Kilgore** died. Al was a friend for many a year. We used to do funny books for Dell and Western years ago, and Al, a fellow film collector as well, used to keep us all on the floor laughing with his wry sense of humor. His death was very sudden, a lung embolism. When one of the "boys" passes on, it is a shame that very little space is given in the comics mags. I saw a clipping from VARIETY — or I would have never known. These things really shake me up. I have become the image of youth and health. Being here in Majorca can have that effect. The "Worry Gland" does not secrete as much here as in other climes.

Russ Jones
P.O. Box 219
Can Pastilla
Baleares, Majorca
SPAIN

TIRED OF ANTI-SHE-HULK TIRADES

Dave,

Just a quick note to let you know how much I enjoyed #5, and to offer my best wishes for your continued success.

On just a couple of other points, first I'll go ahead and make my suggestions for interview subjects, the first being **Eliot Brown.** His technical drawings in the MARVEL UNIVERSE handbook were the high point of the series, and I would be interested to know where he received his training, and how he went about preparing the various pages. Other suggestions are **Roger Stern, Al Milgrom, Romeo Tanghal,** and **Tatjana Wood.**

One final thing. Next time you get a letter from **Mr. Dutter,** please edit out his tirades against the She-Hulk. First, it doesn't seem that the letters pages in COMICS INTERVIEW should be used for his anti-She-Hulk rantings, and second, who cares? C'mon, Barry, lighten up!

Brian Talley
310 Charles St. #1
Newport News, VA 23602

WONDERFUL IDEA

Dear David,

I had to write and let you know that I think you have a wonderful idea for a magazine in COMICS INTERVIEW. So far, in the issues I've read, you've covered a wide variety of people in and around the comics business and done so in a most entertaining, readable way.

Good luck with your monthly schedule. You'll need twice as many interviews as before, so I have a few suggestions on subjects: **Jim Warren, Steve Ditko, Berni Wrightson, Basil Gogos, Mike Kaluta** spring to mind readily.

Gary Kimber
80 Searle Ave.
Downsview, Ont.
CANADA M3H 4A5

WHERE'S ALAN MOORE?

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I'd like to say first of all how much I am enjoying your COMICS INTERVIEW. I try to purchase almost all Marvel, DC, First, Pacific, *et al*, comics each month, plus numerous British comics and fanzines, so the allowance I exist on can get fairly stretched, but COMICS INTERVIEW is always top of my list for U.S. comics-related material and I've read (and bought) all the issues so far. I'd like to see interviews with **Glynis Wein, Lynn Varley,** more Marvel and DC editors, but there's one particular suggestion I'd like you to give especial consideration to — and not just because I am volunteering to conduct the interview myself.

The gentleman I have in mind is **Alan Moore,** almost indisputably Britain's top comics scripter of the moment. You may well have come across his work in the British magazine WARRIOR, a comic that ranks beside CEREBUS in my hall of fame. He scripts the two most popular strips for that — "Marvelman," which is changing the way superheroes are written,

JIM STARLIN

STARLIN speaks about **Warlock, Captain Marvel & Dreadstar** — GERBER, AUSTIN & OLIFF on **Deaths of Superheroes** — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 1. From FOSTER to FRAZETTA — The last ROY G. KRENKEL interview — Cover by STARLIN.

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STAN LEE & ELFQUEST

WENDY & RICHARD PINI — inside **Elfquest**, part 1 — STAN LEE, straight from the shoulder — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 2 — COMICO, COSTANZA & more! Cover by WENDY PINI.

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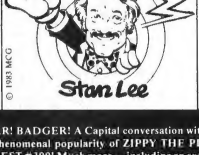
and "V for Vendetta," an extremely chilling and intriguing political 1984-type thriller. He has just begun a humor series for WARRIOR, too, now. Also, he produces four short stories a month for the famous 2000 AD, humorous science-fiction, usually. And he has just been signed as scripter for DC's SAGA OF SWAMP THING, beginning with #30. If *that* isn't enough, when we spoke on the telephone a few days ago, he mentioned plans for some work for First Comics. And I forgot that he writes "Captain Britain" for British Marvel. He's a member of the **Sinister Ducks** rock group, which has just produced its first single. Snatch him up quick before he burns himself out!

I am sure he will make an exceptionally lucid and interesting interviewee, and I am confident that I would be an adequate interviewer. As a comic fan, I got hooked on black-and-white reprints of Marvel material at the age of ten, and have been raiding Forbidden Planet in London every month for four years. I like to think I'm a reasonably discriminating reader who understands the medium, both from the artist's and writer's view. I would like to get **Mr. Moore** talking about his plans for SWAMP THING, about the differences between the way he writes "Marvelman" and "Captain Britain" and the way most Marvel/DC superheroes are written, and about American comics from a British perspective, and the influx of British talent into the industry (**Bolton** and **Bolland** may well just be the start, I think you'll find).

I am very keen to do this and, if you give me the chance, will do my very best for you.

Anthony Wilson
Aston Somerville Manor
Broadway, Worcs, WR12 7JE
ENGLAND

You've certainly got me interested, Anthony — Alan Moore sounds like an excellent interview subject. We'd like to know more about him on this side of the Atlantic — so what are you waiting for?
— DAK



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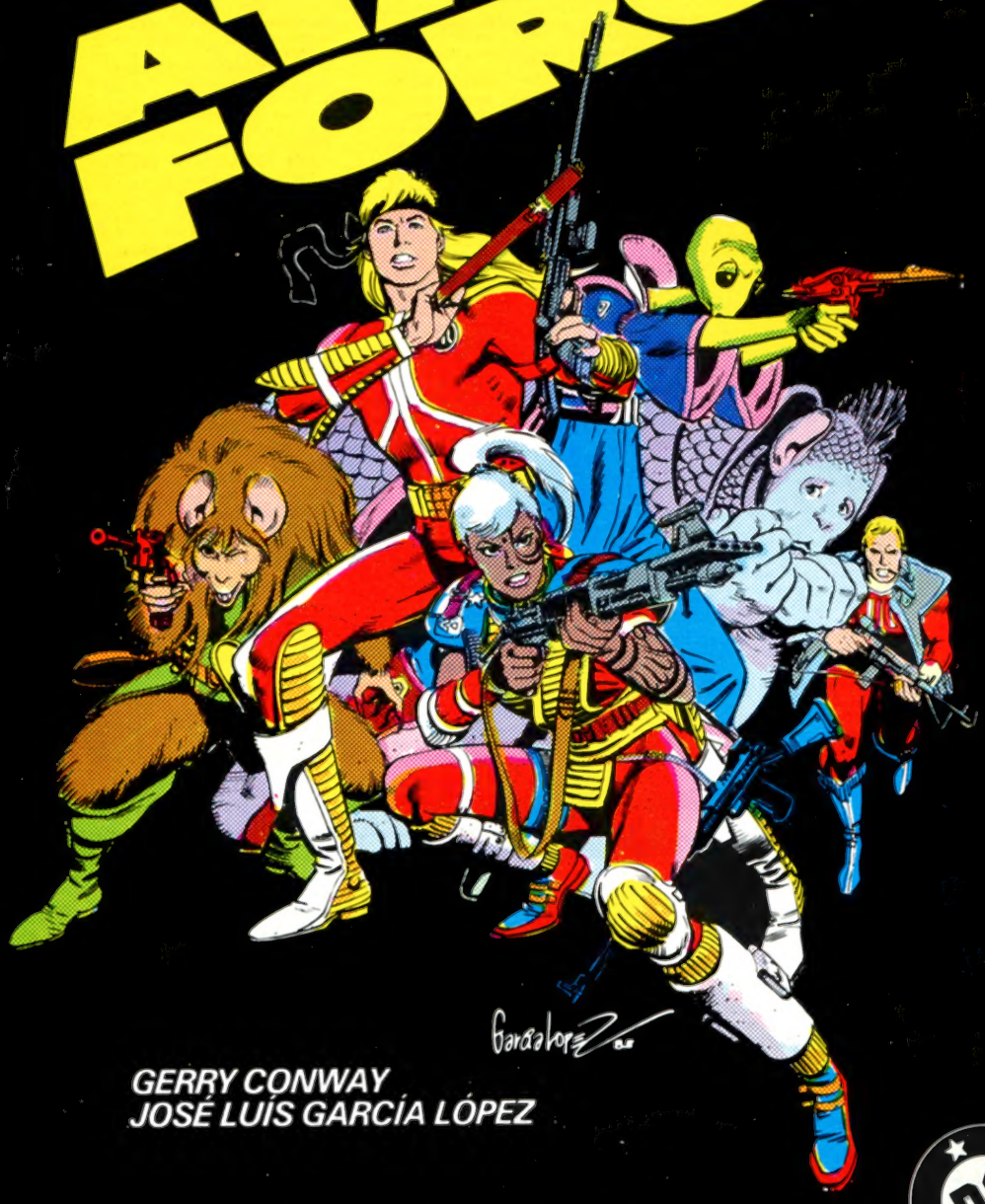

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